

EXPRESSIVE-ASSERTIVISM: A DUAL-USE SOLUTION TO THE MORAL
PROBLEM

By

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To Michele, for her love, support, and friendship.

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This dissertation argues for a metaethical theory I call "Expressive-Assertivism." Expressive-Assertivism is a distinctive, substantial refinement of dual-use metaethical theories traditionally associated with R. M. Hare, C. L. Stevenson, and, more recently, with David Copp. If true, Expressive-Assertivism clarifies, resolves, or dissolves—without, in turn, raising additional difficulties—a number of philosophical problems, including what Michael Smith calls "*The Moral Problem*," which many consider to be the central organizing problem in contemporary metaethics. The following are the three most important features of Expressive-Assertivism.

1. *The Central Tenet*. The proper, literal use of an ethical sentence, such as 'Donating to charity is right', is the performance of a direct expressive illocutionary act *and* a direct assertive illocutionary act. Recognizing that ethical sentences can be used to *both* directly express (in the illocutionary act sense of 'express') a speaker's attitude and directly assert something about the world captures what is intuitively compelling about

"expressivist" theories—namely, that there is some strong connection between a speaker's sincere moral utterance and his or her motivations to act—and what is intuitively compelling about "descriptivist" theories—namely, that moral utterances appear to have descriptive or cognitive content and, therefore, are truth-evaluable. The Central Tenet is the feature of Expressive-Assertivism that dissolves The Moral Problem.

2. *The Generality Principle.* The proper, literal use of an ethical sentence directly expresses (in the illocutionary act sense of 'express') an attitude, *not* toward the subject of the sentence, but *toward things of a more general kind*, namely, things that have the property picked out by the ethical predicate (in our example, not toward donating to charity, but toward anything that is right).

3. *The Extensionality Principle.* A speaker directly expresses (in the illocutionary act sense of 'express') an attitude toward things that have the property picked out by an ethical predicate *whenever* that predicate appears in *any* extensional context. Together, the Extensionality and Generality Principles shield Expressive-Assertivism from many objections to traditional expressivist theories, including "The Embedding Objection," which many consider to be the most difficult problem faced by expressivists.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The fundamental issue in contemporary metaethics is how best to account for data that supports three intuitively compelling but apparently mutually inconsistent claims, without, in turn, raising other significant difficulties. Michael Smith calls this "The Moral Problem," and rightly claims that it "explains the massive disagreement that exists among philosophers about meta-ethical issues" (Smith 1995, p. 11). In this dissertation, I argue that a certain kind of "dual-use" metaethical theory, what I call "Expressive-Assertivism," is best suited to solve The Moral Problem.

The central feature of dual-use metaethical theories is the claim, roughly, that to literally and correctly use an ethical sentence such as (1),

(1) Donating to charity is right,

is to perform more than one act. C. L. Stevenson's Emotivism (1963, pp. 10-31, 55-70) and R. M. Hare's Prescriptivism (1952; 1997) are the most historically well-known dual-use theories, but a dual-use theory has recently been put forward by David Copp, a theory he calls Realist-Expressivism (Copp 2001b). According to Stevenson and Copp, to literally and correctly use an ethical sentence is both to describe the world as being a certain way and to express one's favorable or unfavorable attitude. For example, if a speaker literally and correctly uses (1), the speaker both describes the act of donating to charity as having a certain property, *rightness*, and expresses a favorable attitude toward donating to charity. According to Hare, to literally and correctly use an ethical sentence is both to describe the world and to command, or direct, that everyone act a certain way.

For example, in literally and correctly using (1), the speaker both describes the act of donating to charity as having the property *rightness*, and directs that everyone donate to charity when in circumstances similar to that being considered by the speaker. Of course, what it means to perform acts of "describing the world as being a certain way" and "expressing a favorable or unfavorable attitude" must be spelled out in greater detail, which I do in Chapter 2, but this rough characterization will suffice for the purposes of this introduction.¹

Expressive-Assertivism holds, roughly, that if a speaker literally and correctly uses an ethical sentence such as (1), then (i) the speaker *both* describes the world as being a certain way and expresses a favorable or unfavorable attitude, (ii) the attitude that the speaker expresses is directed toward *anything* that he or she believes has the property picked out by the ethical predicate used in the ethical sentence (in (1), *rightness*), and (iii) the speaker expresses this attitude *whenever* an ethical predicate is used in an extensional context, including antecedents of conditionals. Given (i), Expressive-Assertivism is a dual-use theory more similar to Stevenson's and Copp's theories than to Hare's. Given (ii) and (iii), Expressive-Assertivism differs significantly from all of these theories. Thus, Expressive-Assertivism is a significant refinement to the dual-use approach to solving The Moral Problem.

Dual-use theories faded from the metaethical scene in the latter half of the twentieth century, I believe, because the dual-use feature of these theories was not taken as seriously as it ought to have been—perhaps even by Hare and Stevenson themselves,

¹ Although there is not enough detail in their respective theories to determine with certainty, the theories advocated by Axel Hägerström (1953, especially pp. 116-205), P. H. Nowell-Smith (1954), Paul Edwards (1955), and more recently, Stephen Barker (2000) and Nicholas Rescher (1990) appear to be, in spirit at least, dual-use theories.

who were justifiably far more preoccupied to defend the expressivist (or, in Hare's case, the prescriptivist) element of their theories. Dual-use theories are beginning to re-emerge, I believe, because they are coming to be appreciated for how they straightforwardly and powerfully capture all of the metaethical data that require explaining, without, in turn, raising additional difficulties; that is, they are coming to be appreciated for how they straightforwardly and powerfully solve The Moral Problem. I focus exclusively on The Moral Problem, including the data that give rise to it, in Chapter 3.

There are at least six reasons to favor Expressive-Assertivism, which, together, provide a strong argument in support of the theory. First, as I have already made clear, Expressive-Assertivism captures all the metaethical data that any adequate metaethical theory must explain, namely, the data that support the three intuitively compelling claims that give rise to The Moral Problem, without, in turn, raising additional significant difficulties.

Second, the three main features of Expressive-Assertivism, (i)-(iii) above, are modeled on three uncontroversial features of predicates from other parts of natural languages, so Expressive-Assertivism is unsurprising, credible, and realistic. For example, it is uncontroversial that literal and correct uses of sentences containing emotionally charged predicates, such as sentences used to issue racial epithets (e.g., 'Bob is a ____'), are used to describe certain people as having a certain property (e.g., as being of a certain race or ethnic group), to express the speaker's contempt toward anyone that has that property, and to express this attitude even when these sentences occur in antecedents of conditionals (e.g., 'If Bob is a ____, I'd be surprised').

Third, Expressive-Assertivism gains support from certain thought experiments about translations of ethical predicates. For example, as I discuss in Chapter 4, we should conclude from modified versions of Foot's (1977) and Dreier's (1990, p. 13) thought experiments that there is an ineliminable expressivist element in using ethical predicates, and hence, that the correct metaethical theory is a kind of Expressivist theory.

Fourth, Expressive-Assertivism is consistent with whatever is the correct view about the nature of truth and, so, does not require the acceptance of any particular view about truth. Most importantly, it does not require the acceptance of "Minimalism" about truth, a view according to which there is nothing "robust" or philosophically interesting to say about truth. According to traditional theories of truth, truth is something philosophically interesting, or robust, such as some kind of correspondence between the world and entities that purport to represent, or describe, the world, such as beliefs, assertions, propositions, or indicative sentences. On such a robust view of truth, an indicative sentence is true, for example, just in case the world corresponds to how the sentence describes it as being, and false if it does not so correspond. Most Expressivists feel pressured to reject traditional theories of truth and, *ipso facto*, to accept Minimalism about truth in order to explain why ethical sentences appear to have truth values. For example, ethical sentences such as (1) can be embedded as complement clauses in truth-ascriptions, such as 'It is true that donating to charity is right' and 'The sentence "Donating to charity is right" is true'. However, according to many Expressivist theories, ethical sentences are used only to express attitudes, and not to describe the world. Thus, if a robust theory is correct, Expressivism appears to be committed to the view that ethical sentences do not have a truth value, and hence, appears to be committed to

something that is false. In order to respond to this difficulty, Expressivists often feel pressured to reject traditional notions of truth, thereby invoking Minimalism about truth. Expressive-Assertivism is consistent with Minimalism about truth, but, because it holds that ethical sentences *are* used to describe the world, it is quite capable of accepting a more robust notion of truth. An Expressivist theory that is not forced to accept Minimalism about truth is preferable to one that is forced to accept Minimalism, and so Expressive-Assertivism is preferable to Expressivist theories that reject traditional notions of truth.

Fifth, Expressive-Assertivism is consistent with whatever is the correct view about the nature of moral properties and so does not require the acceptance of any particular view about the nature of moral properties. Most importantly, it does not require acceptance of views according to which moral properties have some very special, surprising, even remarkable features. Most Assertivist theories hold that ethical sentences are used only to describe the world, and not to express attitudes. However, since it certainly appears that speakers express attitudes when literally and correctly using ethical sentences such as (1), and it is not immediately clear how such an appearance can arise if what is being attributed to actions are properties like what we ordinarily take moral properties to be like, e.g., being conducive to human flourishing, being conducive to human welfare, etc., these theories are pressured to hold that moral properties have some very surprising, even remarkable, features. So, we find some Assertivists maintaining, among other things, that moral properties are such that, as a matter of striking, contingent fact, most human beings approve (or disapprove) of things which they believe have that property (Boyd 1988; Brink 1989); are *never* instantiated (Mackie

1977); are metaphysically unlike any other "natural" property (Mackie 1977; Moore 1971; 1993); or are such that all fully informed, rational people would approve (or disapprove) of things which they believe have that property (Smith 1995). All of these views about the nature of moral properties are views that attempt to account for Practicality, which Expressivists can account for rather simply—speakers express attitudes when literally and correctly using ethical sentences. An Assertivist theory that does not require the acceptance of views according to which moral properties have some very surprising or remarkable feature is preferable to one that does, so Expressive-Assertivism is preferable to most other Assertivist theories.

Sixth, Expressive-Assertivism can respond rather easily to each of a family of objections that are usually grouped together under the label "The Embedding Objection." As a group, these objections constitute the most pressing objection to any Expressivist theory. Because The Embedding Objection is the most pressing objection to any Expressivist theory, and because Expressive-Assertivism can respond to The Embedding Objection rather easily, there is little reason to reject Expressive-Assertivism. Chapter 5 is devoted exclusively to Expressive-Assertivism's response to The Embedding Objection.

The layout of the remainder of this dissertation is as follows. In Chapter 2, I explain Expressive-Assertivism in detail by articulating the three most fundamental features of Expressive-Assertivism, what I call the "Central Tenet," "Generality Principle," and "Extensionality Principle," by distinguishing eight different senses of 'express an attitude', and making clear in which of those senses I use the phrase. In Chapter 3, I summarize all the data that any adequate metaethical theory is required to

explain and show how The Moral Problem is generated from this data. I then discuss some of the traditional solutions to The Moral Problem and why Expressive-Assertivism is better suited to solve it. In Chapter 4, I discuss in more detail four other reasons, summarized above, to favor Expressive-Assertivism. Specifically, I show (a) that the three fundamental features of Expressive-Assertivism, which are explained in detail in Chapter 2, are modeled on some uncontroversial features of other evaluative predicates, including what I call "emotionally charged" predicates and so-called "thick" ethical predicates, so Expressive-Assertivism is a theory that is credible and realistic; (b) that certain thought experiments about the translation of ethical predicates support Expressivist ethical theories; and (c) that Expressive-Assertivism is preferable, *mutatis mutandis*, to other Expressivist and Assertivist theories, since it is not forced to accept controversial views about the nature of truth or the nature of moral properties. In Chapter 5, I summarize and respond to the most pressing objection to Expressive-Assertivism, and to all Expressivist theories, The Embedding Objection. In particular, I summarize and defend Expressive-Assertivism from what I take to be the five most forceful objections that arise from the possibility of embedding ethical sentences in more complex sentences, which I call (i) The Objection from Truth- and Fact-Ascriptions, (ii) The Objection from Missing Exclamations, (iii) The Objection from Missing Exclamations, (iv) The Objection from Incomplete Semantics, and (v) The Objection from the Ambiguity of Attitude Attribution Verbs. In Chapter 6, I conclude that, because Expressive-Assertivism solves The Moral Problem, is strongly suggested by the features of other evaluative predicates, is supported by some convincing translation thought experiments, is consistent with but does not require acceptance of some controversial

views about the nature of truth and moral properties, and avoids rather easily the most pressing objection to any Expressivist theory, Expressive-Assertivism is the best overall metaethical theory.

CHAPTER 2

WHAT IS EXPRESSIVE-ASSERTIVISM?

In this chapter, I state and explain in detail the three main features of Expressive-Assertivism—the "Central Tenet" of Expressive-Assertivism, and the "Generality" and "Extensionality" principles. The arguments for these principles are in the remainder of the dissertation and summarized in Chapter 6. In order to prevent misunderstanding of what Expressive-Assertivism is and how it differs from other metaethical theories, I end this chapter by distinguishing nine different senses of the phrase 'expresses an attitude', and explain in which sense Expressive-Assertivism holds that a speaker expresses an attitude in uttering an ethical sentence. In the next chapter, I argue that Expressive-Assertivism is the metaethical theory that is best able to solve The Moral Problem.

The Central Tenet of Expressive-Assertivism

I first state the central tenet of Expressive-Assertivism, and then explain it in detail.

(CT) is the central tenet of Expressive-Assertivism:

(CT): If a speaker properly and literally utters a basic ethical sentence, S, then the speaker performs one direct expressive illocutionary act and one direct assertive illocutionary act.

Central to (CT) are the notions of *basic ethical sentence*, *illocutionary act*, *expressive* and *assertive* illocutionary acts, *direct* illocutionary act, *utterance*, and *proper* and *literal* utterance.

Basic Ethical Sentence

For simplicity, unless stated otherwise, I restrict the set of ethical sentences under discussion to present-tense English sentences of the form $\langle \phi \text{-ing is } R \rangle$ or $\langle \phi \text{-ing is } W \rangle$, where

'is R' and 'is W' represent the English ethical predicates 'is right' and 'is wrong' respectively, and their synonyms. Plausibly, most, if not all, of what I say about ethical sentences, from the point of view of Expressive-Assertivism, can be extended with appropriate modifications to sentences containing other ethical predicates such as 'ought' (if one does not hold that 'ought' is synonymous with 'right'), 'is bad', 'is good', 'is permissible', and so on, as well as to past- or future-tense sentences containing these predicates, and to sentences in other languages that are synonymous with ethical sentences in English. I also restrict ' ϕ ' to terms expressing actions. I call these "basic ethical sentences." Thus, I set aside discussion of sentences whose subjects are persons, institutions, practices, and other nonactions, though, again, most of what I say about ethical sentences can be extended, with appropriate modifications, to sentences containing ethical predicates whose subjects are nonactions. Examples include (1)-(3), but neither (4) nor (5).

- (1) Donating to charity is right.
- (2) Killing innocents for fun is wrong.
- (3) What you are doing now is unethical. (Taking 'is unethical' to be synonymous with 'is wrong')
- (4) Amy is a good person. (Not about an action)
- (5) What you did yesterday was wrong. (Past tense sentence)

Illocutionary Acts

I do not attempt, in this dissertation, to define or to give anything close to a complete analysis of 'illocutionary act'. Doing so is surprisingly complex. For example, one quarter of William Alston's recent book, *Illocutionary Acts and Sentence Meaning* (2000, p. 2), is devoted to sorting out issues involved in an analysis of 'illocutionary act'. It also speaks to the difficulty of defining 'illocutionary act' that John Searle, one of the pioneers in speech act theory, wrote his classics *Speech Acts* (Searle 1969) and

Expression and Meaning (Searle 1979a), in the latter of which he proposes his famous taxonomy of basic illocutionary acts, without ever defining 'illocutionary act'.¹ J. L. Austin, also a pioneer in speech act theory, holds that an illocutionary act is the "performance of an act *in* saying something" (Austin 1975, p. 99), but this characterization is too obscure to serve as a definition or anything close to a complete analysis. Fortunately, it is sufficient for purposes of this dissertation to have only an intuitive grasp of what illocutionary acts are, and this we can have by explaining Austin's initial characterization of illocutionary acts, contrasting these acts with other kinds of acts, providing a way to identify almost all illocutionary acts, and, finally, providing a large number of examples of such acts.

Austin suggestively characterizes an illocutionary act as the "performance of an act *in* saying something," which is to be contrasted with (a) performance of an act *of* saying something, i.e., a locutionary act, and (b) performance of an act *by* saying something, i.e., a perlocutionary act (Austin 1975, p. 99). To borrow an example from Austin (1975, pp. 101-102), suppose *a*, speaking to me, utters the sentence 'Shoot her!'. The locutionary act is *a*'s act *of* saying 'Shoot her!' and meaning by 'shoot' *shoot* and referring by 'her' to *her*; however, *in* saying "Shoot her!" *a* performs the illocutionary act of, say, *commanding* me to shoot her, or *advising*, *urging*, or *ordering* me to shoot her; *by* saying "Shoot her!" *a* performs the perlocutionary act of, say, getting me to shoot her, or

¹ Searle comes close to defining 'illocutionary act' later in *Intentionality* (Searle 1983, pp. 166-176). There, Searle suggests that what turns an action, such as raising one's arm, into an illocutionary act, such as the statement that the enemy is retreating, is that the speaker "imposes" Intentionality on entities that are not "intrinsically intentional" (p. 167), and a speaker does *this* by performing the action "with the intention that the utterance itself has conditions of satisfaction" (p. 167). I think this definition is on the right track, though it requires significant modification and illumination.

of losing my respect, or of causing the referent of 'her' to flee the country, etc. To use another of Austin's examples (1975, p. 102), suppose *a*, speaking to me, utters the sentence 'You can't do that.' The locutionary act is *a*'s act of saying "You can't do that" referring by 'you' to me, meaning by 'can't' *can't*, meaning by 'do' *do*, and referring by 'that' to the act demonstrated by *a*; however, *in* saying "You can't do that," *a* performs the illocutionary act of, say, *informing* me that I can't do that, or *protesting* my doing that, or *warning* me about doing that, etc.; *by* saying "You can't do that," *a* performs the perlocutionary act of, perhaps, stopping me from doing that, or of bringing me to my senses, etc. Thus, for Austin, an illocutionary act is something "over and above" a speaker's uttering a sentence and using its constituent expressions to refer to or to mean what they do in the language of which the sentence is a sentence—*this*, roughly, is what Austin calls a locutionary act. (Shortly, I will try to give more substance to the notion of a locutionary act.) The something over and above the performance of a locutionary act, or the acts we do *in* performing locutionary acts, are acts such as commanding, advising, urging, warning, informing, suggesting, or protesting. (We will give more examples shortly.) However, illocutionary acts do not have anything fundamentally to do with the actual or intended consequences of performing a locutionary act, e.g., they do not have anything fundamentally to do with getting me to shoot her, losing my respect, causing her to flee the country, stopping me from doing that, or bringing me to my senses, which would be perlocutionary acts.²

² More specifically, these acts are perlocutionary effects, i.e., the actual consequences of performing the locutionary act. Acts such as *trying* to get me to shoot her, or *attempting* to get her to flee the country, are perlocutionary intentions or perlocutionary objects.

Austin's characterization of illocutionary acts provides a rough and ready sketch of the lay of the land with respect to speech acts, but we would do well to try to characterize better the notion of illocutionary acts. One way to do so is to provide a way of identifying illocutionary acts. Alston claims that we can identify all illocutionary acts by means of identifying all the verbs that can be used in indirect discourse reports (Alston 2000, especially pp. 13-17). According to Alston, identifying illocutionary acts in this way

is a very different way of introducing the term from that employed by Austin. . . . Following Searle 1969 I analyze an illocutionary act into a "propositional content" and an "illocutionary force". A full-blown *oratio obliqua* report contains a main verb and an attached "content-specifying" phrase. We may take the former to indicate the *illocutionary force* and the latter to indicate the *propositional content*. Thus in 'A predicted that the strike would soon be over', the illocutionary force is that of predicting and the propositional content is *that the strike would soon be over*. In 'A asked B to give him a match', the illocutionary force is that of requesting and the propositional content is *that B gives A a match*. (Alston 2000, pp. 14-15)

Thus, according to Alston, illocutionary acts can be identified as those acts that can be reported using full-blown indirect discourse reports, where a "full-blown" indirect discourse report specifies an illocutionary force and a propositional content. The following are some of Alston's examples of indirect discourse reports that identify illocutionary acts:

- (6) S *told* H that S had left his lights on.
- (7) S *predicted* that the strike would be over soon.
- (8) S *suggested* to H that they go to the movies.
- (9) S *asked* H for a match.
- (10) S *advised* H to sell her utilities stock.
- (11) S *promised* H to read her paper.
- (12) S *expressed* considerable enthusiasm for H's proposal.
- (13) S *reminded* H that it was almost none o'clock.
- (14) S *exhorted* H to try to finish before the end of the week.
- (15) S *congratulated* H on his performance.
- (16) S *announced* that the meeting had been cancelled.
- (17) S *admitted* that the gate was open.

(6)-(17) are, according to Alston, indirect discourse reports of illocutionary acts performed by S—viz., telling, predicting, suggesting, asking, advising, promising, expressing, reminding, exhorting, congratulating, announcing, and admitting.

Alston's suggestion takes us quite a way in identifying illocutionary acts—such a long way, that I think it is sufficient to allow one to have an intuitive grasp of illocutionary acts, which is all I am now after. However, there appear to be acts that, intuitively, ought to count as illocutionary acts for which no "full-blown" indirect discourse report can be given, for example, typical utterances of 'Terrific!', 'Darn!', and 'You're fired'. We can certainly give reports of these acts: 'S expressed enthusiasm', 'S expressed disappointment', and 'S fired A' (where A is the person referred to by S in using 'you') respectively. However, these reports do not specify a propositional content and, therefore, are not "full-blown reports" in Alston's sense. Moreover, it does not seem to me that all of these reports are even indirect discourse reports, since some of these reports appear to leave open that I performed these acts without *saying* anything. For example, suppose I cry because I am disappointed. My act of crying can be reported accurately, it seems, as 'Dan expressed disappointment', though it is clear that I did not express my disappointment by way of an illocutionary act. Thus, I do not think that Alston's way of identifying illocutionary acts works in all cases. However, that it works in *almost* all cases makes it a very useful way to identify a large class of illocutionary acts that can help us to acquire an intuitive grasp of what these acts are. The following is a partial list of illocutionary acts, taken from Alston (2000), which he claims can be identified by identifying indirect discourse verbs that express these types of acts, e.g. 'alleged that', 'reported that', etc: allege, report, insist, claim, maintain, concede, mention,

remind, admit, disclose, deny, ask, request, beseech, implore, command, tell, forbid, propose, promise, bet, guarantee, invite, offer, thank, apologize, commiserate, compliment, express enthusiasm, express relief, express willingness, adjourn, appoint, pardon, nominate, bequeath, hire, and fire. Also, to revert to Austin's initial characterization, it is clear that these are all acts that can be identified by the locution '*in saying something*', e.g. '*In saying ____, S alleged that ____, 'In saying ____, S reported that ____*' etc.

Expressive and Assertive Illocutionary Acts

The previous list makes clear that there are hundreds of distinct kinds of illocutionary acts: asking, requesting, ordering, advising, warning, apologizing, complimenting, adjourning (e.g., a court hearing), promising, hiring, firing, inviting, insisting, maintaining, reminding, and admitting, to name just a few. It is also clear, however, that these many types of acts seem to serve a relatively small number of basic purposes. For example, it seems intuitively obvious that the acts of stating, suggesting, predicting, and summarizing all serve the basic purpose of describing (with different *forces* or *strengths*) the world as being a certain way, just as it seems intuitively obvious that the acts of commanding, telling, and asking all serve the basic purpose of directing (with different forces or strengths) one's hearer to do something. Consequently, there have been attempts to categorize illocutionary acts into a relatively small number of basic illocutionary act types (see, for example, Alston 2000; Austin 1975; Searle 1979a). In what follows, I adopt Searle's taxonomy of basic illocutionary acts into one of five types according to their illocutionary *point* (Searle 1979a, p. 12), a taxonomy that is

coextensive with Alston's taxonomy (2000, p. 34).³ For this dissertation, the two most important types are *assertives*, which describe the world as being a certain way, such as with typical utterances of 'Bob is six feet tall' and 'The temperature is 68-degrees Fahrenheit', and *expressives*, which express a certain psychological state (as opposed to stating *that* one is in that state, which would be an assertive), such as with typical utterances of 'Hooray!' and 'Terrific!'. The other basic types in Searle's taxonomy are *directives*, which direct one's hearer to do something, as with typical utterances of 'Go home', 'Buy some milk', etc; *commissives*, which commit one to a certain course of action, as with typical utterances of 'I promise to buy you a diamond for your birthday'; and *declaratives*, which make something the case in virtue of the speaker's standing in some socially constructed position of authority and uttering certain locutions, as with typical utterances of 'This court is adjourned' uttered by a judge in the appropriate setting (during the course of a trial) and 'You're out!' as uttered by a baseball umpire in the appropriate setting (during a game on a baseball field). Nothing in this dissertation depends on my using Searle's taxonomy. Any other taxonomy could have been used to describe Expressive-Assertivism, provided only that it recognizes assertives and expressives.

³ The main difference between Searle's and Alston's taxonomies appears to be the basis according to which the illocutionary acts are categorized. Searle categorizes them according to their illocutionary point (Searle 1979a, pp. 12), while Alston categorizes illocutionary acts by means of the conventions the obtaining for which a speaker "takes responsibility" in uttering a sentence (Alston 2000, p. 52). That Searle and Alston would derive the same categories despite using apparently different criteria for categorizing illocutionary acts may not be all that surprising, for, plausibly, Alston's notion of taking responsibility may just be a more precise way of cashing out what it is for a sentence to be uttered with a certain illocutionary point.

Direct Illocutionary Act

It is of paramount importance for understanding Expressive-Assertivism to distinguish between direct and indirect illocutionary acts. According to Searle, an indirect illocutionary act is one that is performed by way of performing another:

In hints, insinuations, irony, and metaphor—to mention a few examples—the speaker's utterance meaning and the sentence meaning come apart in various ways. One important class of such cases is that in which the speaker utters a sentence, means what he says, but also means something more. For example, a speaker may utter the sentence 'I want you to do it' by way of requesting the hearer to do something. The utterance is incidentally meant as a statement, but it is also meant primarily as a request, a request made by way of making a statement. In such cases a sentence that contains the illocutionary force indicators for one kind of illocutionary act can be uttered to perform, in addition, another type of illocutionary act. There are also cases in which the speaker may utter a sentence and mean what he says and also mean another illocution with a different propositional content. For example, a speaker may utter the sentence "Can you reach the salt?" and mean it not merely as a question but as a request to pass the salt. (Searle 1979b, p. 30)

Searle's description suggests defining 'indirect illocutionary act' as an illocutionary act that is performed *by way of*, or *on the basis of*, another illocutionary act.⁴ A direct illocutionary act, then, is an illocutionary act that is not an indirect illocutionary act. As Searle notes, one can perform an indirect illocutionary act with the same force but different content as the direct illocutionary act performed. To use one of his examples, a speaker's utterance of 'Can you reach the salt?' is the performance of a direct directive (to ask a question is to direct one's hearer to provide information and, so, is a directive—albeit one with little strength relative to, say, a command) whose propositional content is 'You can reach the salt', and is also the performance of an indirect directive (to request one's hearer to do something is also to direct one's hearer to do something and, so, is a

⁴ 'On the basis of' or 'by way of' can be understood in terms of one's recognition of an illocutionary act. For example, we can say that one performs an illocutionary act A on the basis of performing another illocutionary act B if one can recognize the performance of A only by first recognizing the performance of B.

directive—one with greater strength relative to asking a question) whose propositional content is that you will pass me the salt. One can also perform an indirect illocutionary act with a force different from that of the direct illocutionary act performed. In Searle's example, a speaker's utterance of 'I want you to do it' is the performance of a direct assertive (the speaker states that she wants her hearer to perform the act referred to by 'it'), and may also be the performance of an indirect directive (say, if the sentence is uttered by an army general to a private).

According to (CT), a proper, literal utterance of a basic ethical sentence is the performance of two *direct* illocutionary acts, one expressive and one assertive. It is *not* the case, according to (CT), that a proper, literal utterance of a basic ethical sentence is the performance of one direct expressive and one indirect assertive, nor the performance of one direct assertive and one indirect expressive, nor the performance of an indirect expressive and an indirect assertive. The distinction between direct and indirect illocutionary acts is important, because if we know what direct illocutionary acts are performed in a proper, literal utterance of a sentence S, we know something important about the *meaning* of S; in the other direction, if we know the meaning of S, we know what direct illocutionary acts are performed in a proper, literal utterance of S.

Proper and Literal Utterances

I henceforth use the term 'utterance' in a stronger sense than I have thus far been using the term and than is usually found in the literature, in which the mere production of vocal noises—what Austin calls a "phonetic act"—may be taken to be an utterance. I define 'utterance' as follows:

Utterance: (a) the production of a meaningful sentence of a language (b) *as being* a sentence of that language, (c) in which the speaker uses the sentence's constituent terms intending to refer to or to mean what the speaker

believes the terms refer to or mean in at least one sense these have in the language of which the sentence is a sentence.

By "production of a meaningful sentence of a language," I mean an act which causes there to be a token of a sentence type of a language, which is meaningful in that language. An utterance is the production of a meaningful sentence of a language "as being" a sentence of that language just in case the speaker recognizes that the sentence is a sentence of that language and utters the sentence intending to speak in that language. For example, if a speaker recognizes that (18),

(18) La neige est blanche

is a sentence of French and produces (18) intending to speak French, then the speaker has produced (18) as being a sentence of French. Note that it is possible for a speaker to produce a sentence of a language as being a sentence of that language without *understanding* the sentence. In the example just given, the speaker may recognize that (18) is a French sentence and produce (18) as being a French sentence without understanding (18), or even without recognizing which terms in the sentence are referring terms, predicates, logical connectives, etc. Condition (c) captures the idea that a speaker must be using the terms in the sentence to refer to and to mean what he or she *believes* the words refer to or mean in at least one sense that these have in the language of which the sentence is a sentence in order to count as an utterance in my sense. This leaves open the possibility that the speaker uses the constituent terms improperly, perhaps because he or she is simply mistaken about what a constituent term means. Most productions of meaningful sentences of a language are usually utterances in my sense. For example, for most productions of (19),

(19) Bob is six feet tall,

a speaker produces a meaningful sentence of English, produces (19) *as* a meaningful sentence of English, uses 'Bob' intending to refer to what he or she believes 'Bob' refers to in English (on that occasion of utterance), and uses 'is six feet tall' intending to mean what 'is six feet tall' means in English.

I think my definition of 'utterance' is what Austin meant by 'locutionary act', but I am not certain (Austin 1975, pp. 92-93). According to Austin, a locutionary act is an act in which three other actions—the phonetic, phatic, and rhetic acts—are performed. Austin defines 'phonetic act' as "the act of uttering certain noises," 'phatic act' as "the act of uttering certain vocables or words, i.e., noises of certain types belonging to and as belonging to a certain vocabulary, in a certain construction, i.e., conforming to and as conforming to a certain grammar, with a certain intonation, etc," and 'rhetic act' as "the act of using that pheme or its constituents with a certain more or less definite 'sense' and a more or less definite 'reference' (which together are equivalent to meaning)" (Austin 1975, p. 93). I think conditions (a), (b), and (c) in my definition of 'utterance' capture what Austin means by 'phonetic', 'phatic', and 'rhetic' acts respectively.

I define 'proper utterance' as follows:

Proper Utterance: (a) the production of a meaningful sentence of a language (b) as being a sentence of that language, (c) in which the speaker uses the sentence's constituent terms intending to refer to or to mean what the speaker *correctly* believes the terms refer to or mean in at least one sense that they have in the language of which the sentence is a sentence.

The important qualification in this definition occurs in condition (c), which requires that a speaker use the sentence's constituent expressions intending to refer to or to mean what the speaker *correctly* believes the terms refer to or mean in at least one sense that they have in the language of which the sentence is a sentence. This qualification ensures that

the speaker uses all the constituent terms correctly, i.e., he does not misuse any of the terms.

Notice, however, that a speaker can properly utter (19) in my sense even during a stage play or some other context in which it is clear the speaker is not performing any illocutionary act. If a stage actor properly utters (19), we would do not think that he or she is *asserting* anything. Hence, we need the notion of a literal utterance, which I define as follows:

Literal Utterance: an utterance of a sentence *S* of *L* in which the speaker performs all and only the direct illocutionary act(s) that is (are) appropriate for *S* given its meaning in *L*.

The performance of an illocutionary act *I* is "appropriate for a sentence *S* of *L* given its meaning" if and only if, given the meaning that *S* has in *L* (and, hence, given the rules for using *S* as a sentence of *L*), any competent speaker of *L*, using only this semantic knowledge (and no contextual⁵ or background information or assumptions), would recognize that, under normal conditions (e.g., the speaker is awake at the time of utterance, the speaker is not acting in a stage play at the time of utterance, etc), the speaker performs *I*.

The purpose of focusing on proper and literal utterances of basic ethical sentences is to ensure that we focus on all of the function(s)—i.e., the illocutionary act(s)—and only the functions that speakers of a language conventionally use moral predicates to perform. Since matters will undoubtedly become irrelevantly complicated if we consider

⁵ By "contextual" information or assumptions, I do not mean to include information or assumptions that are normally considered "contextual" in a technical sense, viz., the sense in which such information is required in order to assign semantic values to context-sensitive elements of a sentence, such as knowledge of who the speaker is when a sentence contains the personal pronoun 'I'.

utterances in which a speaker (i) misuses the moral predicate, (ii) does not perform an illocutionary act in uttering a basic ethical sentence, (iii) uses the ethical sentence to perform a function it conventionally has, but not all of the functions it conventionally has, or (iv) uses the predicate to perform all of the functions it conventionally has *and* some other function(s), I explicitly restrict utterances to proper and literal ones.

In what follows, I shall use the following abbreviations: 'P-utterance' and 'P-utters' for 'proper utterance' and 'properly utters' respectively; 'L-utterance' and 'L-utters' for 'literal utterance' and 'literally utters' respectively; and 'PL-utterance' and 'PL-utters' for 'proper and literal utterance' and 'properly and literally utters' respectively.

The Extensionality Principle

According to (CT), if a speaker PL-utters a basic ethical sentence, then the speaker performs a direct expressive and a direct assertive illocutionary act. The Extensionality and Generality Principles tell us more about the direct expressive so performed. The Extensionality Principle tells us more about *when* the speaker performs a direct expressive via a PL-utterance of a basic ethical sentence. The Generality Principle tells us *toward what* the speaker expresses an attitude via her direct expressive illocutionary act.

Discussion of expressivist metaethical theories usually proceeds under the assumption that, even if a speaker performs an expressive illocutionary act via a PL-utterance of a basic ethical sentence, the speaker does not perform an expressive, whether direct or indirect, via a PL-utterance of a more complex sentence that embeds a basic ethical sentence—call these "complex ethical sentences"—nor does she perform an

expressive when ethical predicates are used in non-indicative sentences.⁶ It is commonly assumed—even by expressivists—that PL-utterances of (20)–(24) are not, even in part, performances of expressive illocutionary acts.

- (20) If I am correct, then donating to charity is right.
- (21) If donating to charity is right, then I am correct.
- (22) Donating to charity is right, or (else) I've lost my bet.
- (23) Do what is right.
- (24) Is donating to charity right?

In contrast, Expressive-Assertivism holds that this assumption is *false*. It holds that a speaker performs a direct expressive illocutionary act *whenever* she PL-utters a sentence, whether basic or complex, in which ethical predicates are used in an extensional context. Thus, according to Expressive-Assertivism, if a speaker PL-utters any of (20)–(24), he or she thereby performs a direct expressive illocutionary act. The Extensionality Principle can be summarized, then, as follows:

(EP): If a speaker PL-utters a sentence that contains an ethical predicate in an extensional context, then the speaker performs a direct expressive illocutionary act.

The Generality Principle

The Generality Principle tells us more about the attitude a speaker expresses via the direct expressive performed in PL-uttering any sentence in which an ethical predicate is used in an extensional context. Discussion of expressivist metaethical theories also proceeds under the assumption that *if* a speaker's PL-utterance of an ethical sentence, such as 'Donating to charity is right', is the performance of an expressive illocutionary act at all, the attitude thereby expressed is directed toward the subject of the sentence (in this

⁶ Blackburn is an exception. See, for example, (Blackburn 1998, p. 71) where Blackburn claims that all PL-utterances of complex sentences that embed a basic ethical sentence are direct expressives.

case, toward the act of donating to charity). I argue in Chapter 6 that it is this assumption that drives our intuitions when thinking that no expressive is performed via a PL-utterance of (20)-(24). Expressive-Assertivism holds that this assumption is also *false*—the attitude a speaker expresses (in the illocutionary act sense of 'express') in performing the direct expressive via a PL-utterance of an ethical sentence is *not* directed (at least only—and not by way of literal meaning) toward the subject of the sentence, but *toward things of a more general kind*, namely, things that have the property picked out by the ethical predicate. A predicate F "picks out" a property *p* if and only if the meaning of F requires that something have, in the first instance, the property *p* in order for the thing to be in F's extension. For example, 'is red' picks out the property *redness*, since the meaning of 'is red' requires, in the first instance, that something be red in order for that thing to be in its extension. Likewise, 'is right' or 'is wrong' pick out the properties *rightness* and *wrongness* respectively, since the meanings of 'is right' and 'is wrong' require acts to have these properties in order for the acts to be in their respective extensions. A speaker has an attitude of the appropriate type "toward things that have the property picked out by the ethical predicate" just in case she is disposed, upon being presented with things of the kind that he or she believes have the properties *rightness* or *wrongness*, to approve or disapprove respectively of those things. Expressive-Assertivism, then, also holds (GP):

- (GP) If a speaker PL-utters a basic or complex ethical sentence, the speaker performs a direct expressive illocutionary act expressing some conative attitude toward things of a certain kind, viz., things that have the property picked out by the ethical predicate.

To summarize (EP) and (GP), then, Expressive-Assertivism accepts as fundamental the idea that any sentence—basic or complex—in which an ethical predicate

is used in an extensional context, when PL-uttered, is always used to perform a direct expressive illocutionary act, and the attitude the speaker thereby expresses (in the illocutionary act sense of 'express') is directed toward things of a certain kind, viz., things that have the property picked out by the predicate. Furthermore, according to (CT), a speaker also performs a direct assertive in PL-uttering a basic or complex (indicative) ethical sentence. Thus, according to Expressive-Assertivism, if a speaker PL-utters (25) or (26), a speaker performs a direct assertive illocutionary act⁷ and a direct expressive illocutionary act expressing (in the illocutionary act sense of 'express') some positive attitude toward things of the kind that have the property picked out by 'is right'.

(25) Donating to charity is right.

(26) If I have thought matters through correctly, donating to charity is right.

Nine Senses of 'Expresses an Attitude'

The terms 'expresses' and 'expresses an attitude' are ubiquitous in the metaethical literature, though they are or could be used in at least nine different ways. Thus, it is vital to distinguish these nine different senses of 'express' and 'expresses an attitude' in order to avoid rampant misunderstanding and confusion about what Expressive-Assertivism is and how it differs from other metaethical theories.

Sense 1: A Speaker Performs a Direct Expressive Illocutionary Act

I have spoken of the speaker expressing an attitude in the illocutionary act sense of 'express'. I hope by now this sense is clear. A speaker expresses an attitude in this sense in uttering ϕ if and only if the speaker performs a direct expressive illocutionary act in uttering ϕ . I think that sense 1 is the sense that ought to be attributed to Expressivists

⁷ In a PL-utterance of (25), the speaker performs a direct simple assertive describing the act of donating to charity as having the property rightness. In a PL-utterance of (26), the speaker performs a direct complex assertive describing the world as being such that if she has thought matters through correctly, then donating to charity has the property *rightness*.

such as Ayer, Stevenson, Blackburn, and Gibbard, when it is claimed that Expressivists hold that ethical sentences are used to express an attitude.

Sense 2: A Speaker Asserts that She Has a Certain Attitude

In this sense, a speaker expresses an attitude in uttering ϕ if and only if the speaker performs a direct assertive illocutionary act in uttering ϕ whose content is 'S _____ ψ ', where '_____' is to be completed by a verb that makes plain what attitude S has toward ψ , which is the action denoted in ϕ . For example, L-uttering the sentence 'I approve of donating to charity' would be to express an attitude in this sense, since, in using 'I approve of donating to charity', the speaker is performing a direct assertive illocutionary act whose content is that the speaker approves of donating to charity. Sense 2 is the sense in which subjectivists hold that ethical sentences are used to express an attitude, since subjectivists hold that L-utterances of, for example, 'Donating to charity is right' are the performances of a direct assertive whose content is that the speaker approves of donating to charity. Because Expressive-Assertivism holds that a PL-utterance of an ethical sentence is a direct assertive and a direct expressive illocutionary act, one could be an Expressive-Assertivist and hold that ethical sentences are used to express an attitude in both sense 1 and sense 2. In the next chapter, I will state explicitly that I am assuming throughout the remainder of this dissertation that some kind of non-subjective naturalism is true, and, hence, my version of Expressive-Assertivism denies that a speaker expresses an attitude in sense 2 in PL uttering a basic ethical sentence.

Sense 3: A Speaker Asserts Something that Entails that the Speaker has a Certain Attitude

In this sense, a speaker expresses an attitude in uttering ϕ if and only if the speaker performs a direct assertive whose content entails that he or she has a certain attitude. For

example, if a speaker L-utters the sentence 'Everyone approves of donating to charity', the speaker has performed a direct assertive whose content, viz., that everyone approves of donating to charity, entails that the speaker approves of donating to charity. Many contemporary naturalist theories could hold that a speaker expresses an attitude in sense 3 in uttering an ethical sentence, for example, if he or she were to hold that a speaker performed a direct assertive whose content is 'Everyone approves of donating to charity' in L-uttering 'Donating to charity is right'. I know of no contemporary naturalist who actually holds such a view.

Sense 4: A Speaker Asserts Something that Presupposes, but Does Not Entail, that the Speaker Has a Certain Attitude

A speaker expresses an attitude in sense 4 in uttering ϕ if and only if the speaker performs a direct assertive in L-uttering ϕ whose content presupposes, but does not entail, that the speaker has a certain attitude. For example, suppose a speaker L-utters 'My approval of donating to charity will hopefully influence you to donate to charity as well'. If, as Strawson claimed, descriptions such as 'my approval' are not existential quantifiers, then the speaker performs a direct assertive whose content, *that my approval of donating to charity will hopefully influence you to donate to charity as well*, presupposes, but does not entail, that the speaker approves of donating to charity. Thus, if such a view of descriptions is correct, a naturalist could hold, for example, that the content of a speaker S's L-utterance of 'Donating to charity is right' is something like *S's approval of donating to charity is rational*, in which case S would perform a direct assertive whose content presupposes, but does not entail, that S approves of donating to charity. Again, I know of no naturalist who actually holds such a view.

Sense 5: A Speaker Performs an Illocutionary Act whose Sincerity Demands that the Speaker Has a Certain Attitude

In this sense, a speaker expresses an attitude in uttering ϕ if and only if the speaker performs an illocutionary act in L-uttering ϕ , the sincerity of which requires that the speaker has a certain attitude. For example, it is typically held that if a speaker performs a direct directive in uttering 'Go home!', then the speaker's sincerity in performing this act requires that the speaker has some kind of pro-attitude toward the hearer's going home at some time later than the time of utterance. It is in sense 5 of 'expresses an attitude' that Hare is considered by many to be an Expressivist. According to Hare, if a speaker PL-utters, say, 'Donating to charity is right', then he or she has performed a direct (universally applicable) directive, such as 'Let it be the case that everyone donate to charity', whose sincerity requires that the speaker have some kind of pro-attitude toward the act of donating to charity.

Sense 6: A Speaker Asserts Something that Neither Entails nor Presupposes that the Speaker Has a Certain Attitude, but Nevertheless Strongly Suggests that the Speaker Has a Certain Attitude

In this sense, a speaker expresses an attitude in uttering ϕ if and only if the speaker asserts something that neither entails nor presupposes that he or she has a certain attitude, but nevertheless strongly suggests as much. For example, if a speaker L-utters the sentence 'All rational people approve of donating to charity', it is neither entailed nor presupposed that the speaker approves of donating to charity. Nevertheless, that the speaker has such an attitude is strongly suggested by the speaker's uttering ϕ , since most people count themselves as rational (though by no means *completely* rational). Similarly, if a speaker L-utters the sentence 'If I were you, I would donate to charity', it is neither entailed nor presupposed that the speaker approves of donating to charity; nevertheless,

that the speaker has such an attitude is strongly suggested, since we can presume that most people would not do something of which they do not approve. It is in sense 6 that some contemporary naturalists can be described as holding views according to which a speaker expresses an attitude. For example, as I understand his view, Smith would hold that if a speaker PL-utters 'Donating to charity is right', the speaker performs a direct assertive whose content includes, but is not limited to, *that all fully-rational people would approve of donating to charity* (Smith 1995).

Sense 7: A Speaker Uses a Predicate which Causes the Hearer to Occurrently Believe that the Speaker Has a Certain Attitude

A speaker expresses an attitude in this sense if and only if the speaker uses a predicate which causes the hearer to occurrently believe that the speaker has a certain attitude. For example, a speaker might L-utter 'That is chocolate', which causes the hearer to occurrently believe that the speaker likes chocolate, since, as a factual matter, almost everyone likes chocolate. It is in sense 7 that some contemporary naturalists hold that a speaker expresses an attitude in uttering, say, 'Donating to charity is right'. For example, according to Brink and Boyd, it is a fact—though a contingent one—that almost everyone approves of what is right. Thus, a speaker's L-uttering 'Donating to charity is right' is likely to cause the hearer to occurrently believe that the speaker approves of donating to charity, and, hence, it is in sense 7 that Brink and Boyd could be said to hold views according to which a speaker expresses an attitude in L-uttering an ethical sentence.

Sense 8: A Speaker Utters a Sentence Which is Accompanied by Some Naturally Occurring Result of Having a Certain Attitude

In this sense, a speaker expresses an attitude in uttering ϕ if and only if something that usually occurs as a result of having a certain attitude occurs in the course of uttering ϕ . For example, if a speaker utters any sentence ϕ while crying or blushing or developing an ulcer, the speaker expresses in this sense sadness or embarrassment or frustration respectively in uttering ϕ , since crying, blushing, and developing an ulcer often occur as a result of being sad, embarrassed, and frustrated respectively. Clearly, in this sense, the speaker's expressing an attitude has nothing at all to do with the content of the sentence uttered. In this sense, an attitude could be expressed in L-uttering an ethical sentence by, say, putting stress on the ethical predicate, as when a speaker puts stress on the predicate when uttering 'Donating to charity is *right*' or when a speaker shouts the sentence 'Donating to charity is right!'. Clearly, the speaker's expressing an attitude in these cases has nothing at all to do with the content of the sentence. Rather, the speaker expresses an attitude in this sense in L-uttering (or L-shouting) this sentence by way of his or her behavior in uttering the sentence, specifically, by putting stress on the predicate or by shouting.

Henceforth, it should be understood that it is in Sense 1 of 'expresses an attitude' that, as I have defined 'Expressivism', Expressivist theories, including Expressive-Assertivism, hold that a speaker expresses a pro- or con-attitude in PL-uttering an ethical sentence. In the next chapter, I explain the data for which any adequate metaethical theory is required to account, and explain how it gives rise to The Moral Problem. I then discuss some traditional solutions to The Moral Problem, including some theories that I describe as "Simple Assertivist" and "Simple Expressivist" theories, and the difficulties

with each of these, and then show how Expressive-Assertivism more elegantly solves The Moral Problem.

CHAPTER 3
THE STRENGTH OF EXPRESSIVE-ASSERTIVISM, PART I:
A SOLUTION TO THE MORAL PROBLEM

The Moral Problem is, as Michael Smith says, the "central organizing problem in contemporary meta-ethics . . . [and] explains the massive disagreement that exists among philosophers about meta-ethical issues" (Smith 1995, p. 11). The problem is that of reconciling three intuitively plausible yet apparently mutually inconsistent ethical claims. Discussing The Moral Problem will serve several purposes. First, since The Moral Problem arises from considering the most important data that any adequate metaethical theory is required to explain, discussing The Moral Problem will allow me to present this data in context and, thereby, set the stage for the remainder of the dissertation. Second, since most traditional approaches to solving The Moral Problem involve "single-use" metaethical theories, discussing it will allow me to contrast Expressive-Assertivism and other dual-use theories with their single-use counterparts, what I call Simple-Expressivist and Simple-Assertivist theories. Third, since Expressive-Assertivism elegantly dissolves The Moral Problem, discussing The Moral Problem will allow me to show just how powerful a metaethical theory it is and how seriously dual-use theories ought to have been—and ought still—to be taken.

I will introduce The Moral Problem by summarizing the three intuitively plausible claims and the apparent inconsistency to which they are normally thought to give rise. In doing so, I will remain as faithful to Smith's formulation of The Moral Problem as I can

without thereby also raising issues irrelevant to my project.¹ I will then formulate a speech act version of The Moral Problem, which will make more transparent a hidden assumption that, in addition to the three claims, is required to generate an inconsistency. I then discuss some of the traditional single-use approaches to solving The Moral Problem, all of which accept the assumption. I then show how rejecting the assumption—which is tantamount to accepting a dual-use theory—leads to a swift and powerful dissolution of The Moral Problem. Since there is no *prima-facia* reason to accept the assumption (indeed, there is *prima facie* reason to *reject* it), and since rejecting the assumption leads to the dissolution of perhaps the most important problem in contemporary metaethics, I conclude this introduction by claiming that there is every reason to take dual-use theories, including Expressive-Assertivism, far more seriously than they have thus far been taken.

The Descriptivity and Practicality of Ethics and the Humean Theory of Motivation

The Descriptivity of Ethics

Suppose a speaker PL-utters an ethical sentence, such as (1).

- (1) Paying one's debts is right.

On the face of it, it appears that the speaker is *describing* the act of paying one's debts. That is, the speaker seems to be saying of the act of paying one's debts that it has a certain property, or set of properties, which is picked out by the ethical predicate 'is right'. Thus, the first intuitively plausible claim that gives rise to The Moral Problem is that PL-

¹ I have in mind issues such as what a moral judgment *is* and what it *means* for a judgment to express a psychological attitude.

utterances of ethical sentences are acts of describing the world, i.e., they are assertives.

Let us call this "The Descriptivity of Ethics," or "Descriptivity" for short.

Brink nicely points out three considerations that lend support to Descriptivity (Brink 1989, pp. 25-36). The first consideration is the grammatical form of ethical sentences (1989, p. 25). Ethical sentences that are typically used to make moral judgments are usually in the indicative mood, e.g., 'You ought to pay your debts', 'Giving to charity is the right thing to do', 'It is wrong to enact that policy', 'that policy is bad', etc. Typically, PL-utterances of indicative sentences are direct assertives.² For example, PL-utterances of the indicative sentences 'John is tall' and 'Snow is white' are direct assertives that describe John as being tall and snow as being white. Since sentences that are typically used to express moral judgments are in the indicative mood, and PL-utterances of sentences in the indicative mood are typically direct assertives, it appears that PL-utterances of ethical sentences are direct assertives.

The second consideration in favor of Descriptivity is that ethical terms appear to have descriptive content. As Brink writes,

Our moral judgments not only have fact-stating and property-ascribing *form*; they have cognitivist [i.e., descriptive] *content* as well. Many common moral judgments themselves make reference to moral properties, moral facts, or moral knowledge. For instance, it is often claimed that one should not be held responsible for actions one could not have *known were wrong*, that *goodness* deserves reward, and that the *turpitude* of a crime should determine the severity of punishment, and that *good* intentions do not always excuse. (Brink 1989, pp. 25-26)

Brink's point here is that we can judge, for example, the degree of *turpitude* of a crime.

But, if crimes can be judged according to their degree of turpitude, then turpitude must

² PL-utterances of indicative sentences can also be direct commissives ('I promise to pay you five dollars') or direct declaratives ('This court is adjourned' as PL-uttered by a judge during a trial).

be a property that a crime can possess to a greater or lesser degree. Thus, judging a certain crime as having a certain degree of turpitude appears to be *describing* that crime as having more or less of that property, and hence, moral judgments, including those made in PL-uttering ethical sentences, appear to be direct assertives.

The third consideration in favor of Descriptivity is that many of our actions presuppose that moral judgments, including those made in PL-uttering ethical sentences, have descriptive content. For example, we *recognize* that certain actions are right or wrong, we *deliberate* about the moral status of an action we might take or find ourselves in, we *argue* about what we ought to do, we *reflect* on our moral judgments, and we try to *convince* others that they are morally mistaken, etc. (Brink 1989, p. 29). All of these actions seem to presuppose that there is something to deliberate, argue, reflect, and convince others *about*, and the most plausible candidate is that we deliberate, argue, reflect, and convince others about whether certain actions have certain properties that we describe them as having. For example, if we deliberate or argue whether George Bush is intelligent, what we are doing is deliberating or arguing about whether George Bush has the property *being intelligent*. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that when we deliberate or argue about whether paying one's debts is right, what we are deliberating or arguing about is whether paying one's debts has the property *being right*. These three considerations all lend support to the intuitively plausible claim that PL-utterances of ethical sentences are acts of describing, i.e., are direct assertives.

The Practicality of Ethics

Let us turn to the second intuitively plausible claim that gives rise to The Moral Problem. Suppose again that a speaker PL-utters (1), repeated here,

- (1) Paying one's debts is right.

Intuitively, we understand the speaker to *approve* of paying one's debts, or to have some other positive conation or attitude toward paying one's debts. It would be surprising, to say the least, to discover upon investigation that one who PL-utters (1) disapproves of, or has some other negative conation toward, paying off debts. Indeed, such a discovery would be so surprising as to suggest that there is some kind of conceptual necessity between a speaker's PL-utterance of (1) and the speaker having some kind of positive conation toward paying off debts. As McNaughton writes,

Being in a particular cognitive [descriptive] state, such as believing something, or doubting it or knowing it, does not seem to be essentially connected with feeling. Of course, I may care very much about some belief of mine, I may very much want it to be true. But it seems perfectly possible, maybe even desirable, that we should be dispassionate about our beliefs. After all, what matters in the end is whether or not they are true, and that depends on how things are not on how we feel about them. By contrast, our moral views do seem to involve our feelings in a direct manner. It is surely not possible to have a deeply held moral conviction about some issue and yet not care about it. The very terms we use to describe actions that we morally condemn, such as 'outrageous', 'appalling' or 'intolerable', betray the link with feeling. (McNaughton 1988, p. 8)

Thus, the second intuitively plausible claim is that there is some kind of conceptual necessity between a speaker's moral judgments, including PL-utterances of ethical sentences, and the speaker's having some kind of appropriate positive or negative attitude. The simplest and most plausible explanation of the necessary connection is that the speaker performs a direct expressive illocutionary act when PL-uttering an ethical sentence, since expressives are acts of expressing one's positive or negative attitudes.³

Let us call this, following Smith, "The Practicality of Ethics," or "Practicality" for short.

³ Strictly speaking, we could also say that a speaker who PL-utters an ethical sentence is performing a directive (e.g. to *command* that everyone pays his or her debts, as if the speaker uttered "Let it be the case that we all pay our debts"), since sincere directives also require the speaker to have the conative state typically associated with a PL-utterance of an ethical predicate (Searle 1979a, pp. 13-14). This, in fact, is the main feature of Hare's Prescriptivism, and is why he is considered by many to be an "Expressivist."

There are at least two considerations that lend support to Practicality. First, it appears that a change in attitude reliably follows in the wake of a change in moral judgment. If A thinks that paying one's debts is right, and then I convince him that paying one's debts is wrong, it would be odd to discover upon investigation that A still has positive conations towards paying one's debts. One would simply think that A had not been convinced at all. Thus, there appears to be a conceptual link between moral judgments, including PL-utterances of ethical sentences, and a speaker's conations. This first consideration is closely related to a second, namely, that there is a strong link between a person's acceptance of a moral claim and the person's motivation or reasons for acting. To use an example from Smith, (1995, p. 6) suppose you and I are discussing whether or not we ought to donate some of our money to famine relief. We debate the pros and cons of doing so, and you convince me that we ought to do so. At that moment, volunteers from World Vision ring my doorbell and ask for a donation, but I send them on their way without making a contribution. Because you know that I have the money to contribute something, and that there is every reason to expect that a large percentage of my contribution will be used to feed the hungry rather than, say, go toward administrative costs, you protest my sending them on their way, and I defend myself by saying: "Well, I agree that I should give to famine relief, but I do not have any motivation or reason to give to famine relief." Clearly, there is something puzzling about my defense, and this suggests that there is some kind of link between the PL-utterance of an ethical sentence and the speaker's motivation or reasons for action. As Smith concludes, "moral judgments seem to be, or imply, opinions about the reasons we have for behaving in certain ways, and, other things being equal, having such opinions is a matter of finding

ourselves with a corresponding motivation to act" (Smith 1995, p. 7). That there appears to be a strong link between one's moral judgments, including one's PL-utterances of ethical sentences, and one's motivation or reasons for action lends strong support to The Practicality of Ethics.

The Humean Theory of Motivation

Let us now turn to the third intuitively plausible claim that gives rise to The Moral Problem. This claim has two parts. The first part is that it is not the case that, for any particular belief-conation pair, there is a necessary connection between that particular belief and that particular conation. That is, for any belief-conation pair, we can always imagine someone having that belief but lacking that conation, and vice versa. The second part of the claim is that what appears to be the best theory of motivation, i.e., the Humean belief-desire theory of motivation, holds that being motivated to ϕ , where ϕ -ing is a derived motivation, requires that the agent have both a belief and a conation. In order to be motivated to ϕ , one must (i) desire that the world be a certain way and (ii) have certain beliefs about the way the world is (including beliefs about the best way to satisfy one's desire, namely to ϕ). An example of McNaughton's illustrates well Hume's belief-desire theory:

The desire to eat an apple provides the motivational push which drives the agent to act but furnishes no information about how to satisfy that desire. Beliefs, which are themselves lacking in motive force, supply that information and thus guide or channel that push in appropriate directions. Thus the belief that I can buy apples at the local store channels the latent energy in my desire for apples in the direction of the shops. The combination of belief and desire is required to motivate the agent to act. Desires without beliefs are blind; beliefs without desires are inert. (McNaughton 1988, p. 21)

Thus, the third intuitively plausible claim is that it is always possible to separate beliefs and conations, and that both beliefs and conations are required in order to be motivated.

In the (analogous) terminology of speech act theory, it is always possible to perform an assertive with a certain descriptive content, without thereby also expressing a positive or negative attitude toward the thing being described, i.e., without thereby also performing an expressive. Let us call this "Distinctness."

The Moral Problem

The Moral Problem, then, is that of reconciling Descriptivity, Practicality, and Distinctness. According to Descriptivity, in PL-uttering an ethical sentence, the speaker is describing the act referred to in the ethical sentence as having a certain property, i.e., the speaker is performing a direct assertive. Using the following notation,

r: a representation/descriptive content

u: a PL-utterance of an ethical sentence

U α : α is a PL-utterance of an ethical sentence

IA α : α is an illocutionary act that is performed in PL-uttering an ethical sentence

Ca β : α has descriptive content β

Aa β : α is a direct assertive with descriptive content β

Ea: α is a direct expressive

we can formulate Descriptivity as (D).

$$(D) (\forall x) (IAx \rightarrow (\exists r) Axr)$$

According to Practicality, there appears to be a necessary connection between PL-utterance of an ethical sentence and a speaker's appropriate positive or negative conations, i.e., in terms of speech act theory, the speaker appears to be performing a direct expressive. Thus, we can formulate Practicality as (P).

$$(P) \square (\forall x) (IAx \rightarrow Ex)$$

According to Distinctness, it is always possible to separate beliefs and conations, and both beliefs and conations are required for motivation. In the terminology of speech act theory, for any descriptive content r, it is possible for a speaker to perform a direct

assertive with content r without thereby also performing a direct expressive. We can formulate Distinctness as (H) (for the *Humean* belief-desire theory of motivation).

$$(H) (\forall r) \Diamond (\exists u)(Cur \cdot Aur \cdot \sim Eu)$$

Thus, the following is a speech act version of The Moral Problem.

Speech Act Version of the Moral Problem

$$(D) (\forall x) (IAx \rightarrow (\exists r) Axr)$$

$$(P) \Box (\forall x) (IAx \rightarrow Ex)$$

$$(H) (\forall r) \Diamond (\exists u)(Cur \cdot Aur \cdot \sim Eu)$$

Intuitively, the contradiction that arises is that, from (D), a PL-utterance of an ethical sentence is the performance of a direct assertive with a certain content, r , and, from (P), also and necessarily is the performance of a direct expressive. However, (H) tells us it is always possible to perform a direct assertive with some content without also performing an expressive; hence, Descriptivity, Practicality, and Distinctness appear to be mutually inconsistent.

Single-Use Solutions to The Moral Problem

Given the apparent inconsistency of these intuitively compelling claims, it is not surprising to find contemporary metaethicists resolving it by rejecting one or more of the claims—and disagreeing about which to reject. The cost of doing so, however, is that they run the risk of rejecting a claim that is more certain than the theories they themselves go on to offer (Smith 1995, pp. 12-13). In this section, I discuss some traditional single-use metaethical theories and the immediate difficulties they face. I do not object all-out to these views, since doing so requires that I provide plausible responses to the initial objections, then reply to those responses, and so on. My goal here is merely to show that these single-use theories quickly run into complications that are easily avoided by

accepting the intuitively compelling claim that each rejects. I will then show that rejecting any of these claims is unnecessary, since the claims are not inconsistent after all.

Simple Expressivism

Simple-Expressivism is the view that (SE) is true:

- (SE) If a speaker PL-utters a basic ethical sentence *S*, then the speaker performs one direct illocutionary act, *I*, in PL-uttering *S*, (ii) *I* is the only direct illocutionary act performed in PL-uttering *S*, and (iii) *I* is an expressive.

Simple-Expressivists therefore reject Descriptivity, the claim that a speaker performs a direct assertive in PL-uttering an ethical sentence and, *ipso facto*, reject an intuitively compelling claim. Furthermore, because they reject Descriptivity, they have to account for the data that supports Descriptivity without, in turn, raising additional difficulties.

Ayer (1952, Ch. 6), Blackburn (1993), and Gibbard (1990) are the most well-known Simple Expressivists. Ayer's theory, "Emotivism," is simply the view the (SE) is true. Ayer was apparently not bothered by his rejection of Descriptivity, so he did not take up the burden of trying to explain the data that strongly support Descriptivity. Neither, as far as I can tell, does Gibbard. Thus, Ayer and Gibbard do not meet a hefty burden that ought to be met. I take this to be a severe drawback to their theories.

Blackburn, however, does take up part of this burden. According to Blackburn's most recent account of his theory, a speaker directly expresses an attitude of value when PL-uttering a basic ethical sentence, where a value for Blackburn is "a relatively fixed attitude to some aspect of things, an attitude with which one identifies in the sense of being set to resist change, or set to feel pain when concerns are not met" (Blackburn 1998, pp. 68-69).⁴ Recall that some of the data that support Descriptivity is that many of

⁴ In Blackburn's terminology, a person "avows" an attitude of value when PL-uttering a basic ethical sentence (Blackburn 1998, pp. 68-69).

our actions concerning ethical matters presuppose that basic ethical sentences have descriptive content. For example, we *reason* about whether an act is right, *deliberate* about whether an act is right, try to *persuade* others that a certain act is right, and so on, and the most plausible explanation for what we are doing when we deliberate, reason, or try to persuade others about ethical concerns is that we are deliberating, reasoning, and trying to persuade others that what is under consideration has a certain property. However, according to Blackburn, what we are doing when we engage in these activities is deliberating, reasoning, persuading, and so on, about whether or not to value that which is under consideration:

So what is it to believe that something is good, wonder whether it is good, to deny that it is good, to be undecided that it is good, or to know that it is good? In basic or typical cases:

believing that X is good or right is roughly having an appropriately favorable valuation of X;

wondering whether X is good or right is wondering what to do/what to admire or value;

being undecided is not knowing what to do/what to admire, etc.;

knowing that X is good is knowing to choose X/admire X, etc..

Here, the practical states on the right-hand side are voiced and discussed in terms of attitudes to the saying or thought on the left. This is what I mean by saying that the moral proposition is designed or invented or emerges naturally as the focus for our practical transactions. (Blackburn 1998, pp. 69-70)

Because our actions and other parts of our practical lives are largely affected by what we value, it is not surprising in the least to find that we reason, deliberate, or try to persuade others about what to value. Therefore, that we deliberate or reason about ethical matters does not presuppose that we are *ascribing* a property to that which is under consideration; it equally supposes that we are determining whether or not to *value* that which is under

consideration. Blackburn has elsewhere called this "Quasi-Realism" (See Blackburn 1993, pp. 4 and 15], and his entire Expressivist theory he has called "Projectivism" (Blackburn 1993, p. 55).

Blackburn's Quasi-Realism is a plausible, alternative account of part of the data that supports Descriptivity, but there are several immediate difficulties with the whole of Blackburn's Projectivism. First, it does not account for why ethical sentences are in the indicative mood. By itself, this is not a strong indictment against the theory, since, as we have seen, not all sentences in the indicative mood, when PL-uttered, are direct assertives; some are direct commissives or direct declaratives. However, this difficulty is especially acute when we realize that there is already a grammatical mood in natural languages like English whose PL-utterances are paradigmatically direct expressives, viz., exclamations (e.g., 'Hooray for the team!', 'Down with Bin Laden!'). Since there is already a grammatical mood whose paradigmatic function is to be used to perform direct expressives, and since Blackburn holds that PL-utterances of basic ethical sentences are direct expressives, Blackburn owes us an explanation of why ethical sentences are not in the exclamatory mood. Blackburn also owes us an explanation for why ethical terms appear to have descriptive content. Recall that these are the other two kinds of data that support Descriptivity.

Second, in order to explain the embedding of basic ethical sentences in more complex sentences, Blackburn provides a general account of complex sentences⁵ according to which a PL-utterance of *any* complex sentences is a direct expressive. According to Blackburn,

⁵ For present purposes, a complex sentence is a sentence that embeds an atomic sentence.

If we want to know in other terms what is going on when we so put forward an attitude, we must look to the function of the indirect contexts in question. The key idea here is one of a functional structure of commitments that is isomorphic with or mirrored by the propositional structure that we use to express them. Thus someone may be what I called "tied to a tree": in a state in which he or she can only endorse some combination of attitude and belief. Suppose I hold that either John is to blame, or he didn't do the deed. Then I am in a state in which *if* one side is closed off to me, I am to switch to the other—or withdraw the commitment. And this is what I express by saying 'Either John is to blame, or he didn't do the deed', or equally, 'If John did the deed, he is to blame'. By advancing disjunctions and conditionals we avow these more complex dispositional states. (Blackburn 1998, p. 71)

According to Blackburn, then, all PL-utterances of complex sentences are direct expressives, the attitude thereby expressed is commitment, and the commitment thereby expressed is directed toward the holding of certain combinations of beliefs or values. Thus, to PL-utter (2),

(2) If John did the deed, he is to blame⁶

is to perform a direct expressive expressing the speaker's commitment to holding various combinations of belief, specifically, that the speaker is committed to holding the belief that John is to blame *if* he holds the belief that John did the deed; to not holding the belief that John did the deed *if* he does not hold the belief that John is to blame; and so on. To PL-utter (3),

(3) If lying is harmful, then lying is wrong

a complex sentence that embeds a basic ethical sentence, is to perform a direct expressive expressing the speaker's commitment to holding various combinations of beliefs and values, specifically, that the speaker is committed to holding a negative value toward lying *if* she holds the belief that lying is harmful; to not holding the belief that lying is harmful *if* she does not hold a negative value towards lying; and so on. That all PL-

⁶ I take Blackburn to be using 'blame' as a nonethical term.

utterances of complex sentences, including those that do not embed basic ethical sentences, are direct expressives is certainly counterintuitive. For example, it is certainly surprising to find that the *point* of uttering (2), which embeds only indicative sentences typically used to describe the world, is to express an attitude. I take such an implication to be a serious difficulty for Blackburn's theory.

Third, given his view that PL-utterances of complex ethical sentences are direct expressives, Blackburn also holds that PL-utterances of sentences that ascribe truth, such as 'Lying is wrong' is true', or 'It is true that lying is wrong' are also direct expressives, and not direct assertives. Thus, in PL-uttering 'Lying is wrong' is true', the speaker is not *describing* the sentence 'Lying is wrong' as having the property *truth*, but rather is directly expressing an attitude. Moreover, according to Blackburn, the attitude thereby expressed is just the same as if the speaker had PL-uttered 'Lying is wrong'. Thus, Blackburn holds a minimalist conception of truth according to which there is nothing philosophically interesting or important about truth. The truth predicate is a linguistic device that allows us "just to repeat our commitments" (Blackburn 1998, p. 78), specifically, those commitments or values we express in PL-uttering the ethical sentence mentioned in the more complex sentence. Blackburn is not bothered by holding a minimalist view about truth, and indeed, he has argued at length for the plausibility of such a view (Blackburn 1993a; 1993b; 1998, pp. 77-83). However, despite his and others' arguments in support of truth minimalism, such a view about remains controversial, and a more robust view about truth (such as some kind of correspondence) should remain the default view. This, I take it as a strike against his Projectivism that he is forced to accept minimalism about truth. That Blackburn does not account for why

sentences that are conventionally used to make moral judgments are in the indicative mood (especially given that there is already a grammatical mood in English that is paradigmatically used to perform direct expressives) or why ethical terms appear to have descriptive content, that he holds that PL-utterances of all complex sentences are direct expressives, and that he is forced to hold minimalism about truth is enough to show that Blackburn's Projectivism is more doubtful than the intuitively compelling claim he rejects, namely, Descriptivity. Of course Blackburn would no doubt respond to these objections, but again, my point here is merely to show that, in denying Descriptivity, Blackburn's theory faces initial, formidable complications that need not be faced by a theory that accepts Descriptivity.

Simple-Assertivism

Simple-Assertivism is the view that (SA) is true:

(SA): If a speaker PL-utters a basic ethical sentence, then (i) the speaker performs a direct illocutionary act *I*, (ii) *I* is the only direct illocutionary act thereby performed, and (iii) *I* is an assertive.

Simple-Assertivists thus resolve The Moral Problem by rejecting Practicality, the claim that PL-utterances of ethical sentences are direct expressives. Because Practicality is so intuitively compelling, and because Simple-Assertivists reject Practicality, Simple-Expressivists have the burden of accounting for the data that supports Practicality, without, in turn, raising additional difficulties. However, in doing so, most end up with accounts of moral properties that are unhelpful, surprising, sometimes remarkable, or raise additional difficulties. I will discuss briefly the Simple-Assertivist theories of Moore (1993, Sect. 5-17), Mackie (Mackie 1977), and Smith (1995).

Moore did not specifically seek to account for Practicality, and it is a strike against his theory that he did not. More importantly, Moore thought that there was something

very special about moral properties (Moore 1993, Sect. 5-17). Relying on the Open Question Argument, which purported to show that no ethical predicate was synonymous with any nonethical predicate, and the assumption that the properties picked out by two predicates are identical only if the predicates are synonymous, Moore concluded that moral properties are not identical with any "natural" property, such as *being conducive to human welfare*, *maximizing pleasure*, or any other property discoverable by the senses or investigated in the natural sciences. Thus, according to Moore, moral properties are *sui generis*, nonnatural properties that can be picked out only by ethical predicates. The difficulty with Moore's account, of course, is understanding just what moral properties are on this account and how we come to discover or identify actions having these properties, if we do not do so through our senses or through empirical investigation. Thus, Moore does not account for the data that strongly suggests Practicality, his theory advocates an account of moral properties that make them quite mysterious, and it is unclear how we are to identify or discover acts that have these properties, if they are as Moore claimed.

Like Moore, Mackie claimed that moral properties are unlike any other property that can be picked out using nonmoral predicates, and accepted Moore's conclusion that moral properties are nonnatural properties. Unlike Moore, however, Mackie attempted to account for Practicality by concluding that moral properties have the incredible feature of *necessarily* motivating *anyone* to perform an act that he or she believes has this property (Mackie 1977, pp. 33 and 40).⁷ However, as Mackie claims, this feature of moral

⁷ More specifically, the property *rightness* has the feature of necessarily motivating a person to perform an act that he or she believes is right, the property *wrongness* has the feature of necessarily motivating a person to not perform an act that he or she believes is

properties make them so remarkable that there is no reason at all to believe that they are ever instantiated. Thus, all ethical sentences are false (Mackie 1977, p. 35). No act, including donating to charity, paying one's debts, helping an elderly gentleman to cross the street, is right (or wrong), nor is any act, including torturing people for fun, cutting off someone's arms to see what she looks like, lighting cats on fire for fun, wrong (or right), since nothing instantiates the remarkably powerful properties of *rightness* or *wrongness*. Thus, although Mackie accounts quite nicely for Practicality, he does so at the cost of holding that moral properties are especially "queer" (Mackie 1977, p. 38], are never instantiated, and hence, that no ethical judgments are true. Surely, a moral theory that accounts for Descriptivity, Practicality, and Distinctness without paying such costs is preferable, all things considered, to one that does.

Smith's Simple-Assertivist theory accepts Descriptivity at the cost of rejecting Practicality. Thus, he must account for the data that suggest Practicality. His theory, however, fails to do so adequately and, moreover, raises epistemological difficulties. According to Smith, moral properties have a very special feature, namely, that, necessarily, all fully rational people would approve (or disapprove) of acts that have those properties (Smith 1995, pp. 177-181).⁸ Thus, paying off one's debts (in circumstance C) is right if and only if, necessarily, all fully rational people would

wrong, etc. That moral properties have the extraordinary power to necessarily motivate individuals who believe a moral property to be instantiated is precisely why Mackie takes them to be nonnatural—there is simply no way that any property that is discoverable by our senses or investigated in the natural sciences could have such power, so moral properties must be nonnatural.

⁸ More specifically, necessarily, all fully rational people would desire that acts that are right be performed, and necessarily, all fully rational people would desire that acts that are wrong not be performed (Smith 1995, pp. 177-18). I take it that Smith intends the necessity involved to be metaphysical necessity, but I'm not sure.

approve of paying off one's debts (in C); paying off one's debts is wrong (in C) if and only if, necessarily, all fully rational people would disapprove of paying off one's debts (in C).

I doubt that moral properties have the feature that Smith attributes to them, but I shall accept Smith's claim for present purposes, for there are more important worries about his account. Smith indeed intends his account of moral properties to explain the data that support Practicality. Thus, his account must explain why it is that a change in attitude follows reliably in the wake of a change in moral judgment and why a person who makes a moral judgment is motivated to perform acts in accordance with that judgment. However, his account does not adequately do so. Suppose I hold at time t that paying off one's debts is wrong (say, because I believe that paying off one's debts fosters individual irresponsibility), but come to believe at t_1 that paying off one's debts is right. According to Smith, what I have done is moved from judging that paying off one's debts has a certain property, *wrongness*, which is such that, necessarily, all fully rational people would disapprove of acts that have that property, to judging that paying off one's debts has a different property, *rightness*, which is such that, necessarily, all fully rational people would approve of acts that have that property. But how does this explain that *my* attitude toward paying off one's debts has changed from disapproval at t to approval at t_1 , given that I have no illusions of being fully rational? Perhaps if Smith's account were *supplemented* with the claim that everyone, or most everyone, aspires to approve (or disapprove) of acts that a fully rational person approves (or disapproves of), this supplemented account might explain the change in my attitude. I see no reason to believe that most people in fact aspire to approve (or disapprove) of acts that a fully rational

person approves (or disapproves) of, and Smith provides no reason for us to believe it. More importantly, however, even this supplemented account is too impoverished to explain the data that support Practicality. What the supplemented account also requires is the claim that most people *believe* that moral properties are such that, necessarily, all fully rational people would approve (disapprove) of acts that have these properties. For unless most people believe that moral properties have this feature, there will be no reason at all for us to expect a change in *my* attitude from *t* to *t_f*. Very few people, I'm sure, believe that moral properties have this feature. So, even if Smith's claim about this feature of moral properties is correct, which I doubt, it does not explain the data that suggests Practicality without being supplemented by two other claims that we have no reason to believe are true. Since Smith's account of moral properties is intended, but fails, to explain the data that suggest Prescriptivity, we have no reason to accept Smith's Simple-Assertivist theory.

Smith's account of moral properties also raises epistemological difficulties. According to Smith's account of moral properties, about the only thing we know about them is that, necessarily, all fully rational people approve (disapprove) of acts that have them. Thus, absent some special faculty of moral perception, it looks like the only way we can know or be justified in believing that any act is right or wrong is to know or be justified in believing that, necessarily, all fully rational people would approve (or disapprove) of the act. However, it is not clear how we can know, or even have justified beliefs about, what it is of which, necessarily, all fully rational people would approve (disapprove). Thus, given Smith's account of moral properties, it is not clear how we can come to have moral knowledge, or even any justified moral beliefs. Smith's Simple-

Assertivist theory, therefore, fails to adequately account for the data that supports Practicality and, moreover, raises additional epistemological difficulties.

Dissolution of The Moral Problem

Recall the three claims that give rise to The Moral Problem:

- (D) $(\forall x)(IAx \rightarrow (\exists r) Axr)$
- (P) $\Box (\forall x)(IAx \rightarrow Ex)$
- (H) $(\forall r) \Diamond (\exists u)(Cur \cdot Aur \cdot \sim Eu)$

Intuitively, the contradiction that arises is that, from (D), a PL-utterance of a basic ethical sentence is the performance of a direct assertive with a certain content, r , and, from (P), also and necessarily is the performance of a direct expressive. However, (H) tells us it is always possible to perform a direct assertive with some content without also performing a direct expressive; hence, Descriptivity, Practicality, and Distinctness appear to be mutually inconsistent. Single-use theories attempt to solve The Moral Problem by rejecting either Descriptivity or Practicality, but at the cost of either not accounting for the data that strongly support the claim each rejects, raising additional, significant difficulties, or both. Hence, single-use theories are often more suspect than the intuitively compelling claim each rejects.

However, a closer look at Descriptivity, Practicality, and Distinctness shows that they do not generate a contradiction in the absence of an additional assumption. From (D) and (P), all that follows is that a PL-utterance of a basic ethical sentence is both a direct assertive and a direct expressive, i.e., (4):

$$(4) (\forall x)(IAx \rightarrow ((\exists r) Axr \cdot Ex)).$$

However, (4) is perfectly consistent with (H), for all (H) says is that it is always possible to perform a direct assertive with a certain descriptive content without also performing a

direct expressive. And doing so is always possible, for it is always possible to have a predicate in a language whose function is to be used to perform a direct assertive with descriptive content *r* without also performing a direct expressive. Indeed, if moral properties are just natural properties, then it is not hard at all to imagine having such predicates in English, for it is likely that such predicates are already part of English. For example, if the moral property *rightness* is just the property of *maximizing general welfare*, then a PL-utterance of (5) and (6) are both direct assertives with the same descriptive content, although a PL-utterance of (5) is also the performance of a direct expressive.

(5) Paying one's debts is right

(6) Paying one's debts maximizes the general welfare

Notice that (4) and (H) are consistent even if there are not already predicates in English that pick out the same properties that ethical predicates pick out, for all (H) says is that it is *possible* to perform a direct assertive illocutionary act with descriptive content *r* without also performing a direct expressive, and it is always possible to *introduce* such predicates into English. For example, it is always possible to introduce into English the predicate 'is right*', which picks out the same property as 'is right', but whose function is to be used only to perform a direct assertive, and not also a direct expressive. Thus, the three intuitively compelling claims generate a contradiction only if one also assumes that a PL-utterance of a basic ethical sentence is not the performance of both a direct assertive and a direct expressive, i.e., Assumption.

Assumption: $(\forall x) (IAx \rightarrow \sim ((\exists r) Axr \cdot Ex))$

Thus, one can easily accept the three intuitively plausible claims jointly, if one rejects Assumption and holds instead that a PL-utterance of an ethical sentence is the

performance of two different illocutionary acts, one direct assertive and one direct expressive. If ethical sentences are, as Edwards claimed nearly fifty years ago, "convenient ways of doing several things at once" (Edwards 1955, p. 221), namely, to assert and to express, then there is no moral problem of the kind often thought to obtain. That a PL-utterance of a basic ethical sentence is the performance of both a direct assertive and a direct expressive is, of course, The Central Tenet of Expressive-Assertivism, and is the hallmark of a dual-use metaethical theory.⁹

There is no pressure to accept Assumption. Indeed, given the data that strongly supports Descriptivity and Practicality, there is pressure to *reject* it, for the data suggests that Assumption is intuitively false. Thus, one who suggests that there is a moral problem of the kind normally thought to obtain has the burden of supporting Assumption—a hefty burden, given our strong intuitions that it is false. Because rejecting Assumption is tantamount to accepting The Central Tenet of Expressive-Assertivism, I conclude that Expressive-Assertivism is an elegant solution to The Moral Problem. Furthermore, because The Central Tenet is accepted by other dual-use theories, including Stevenson's Emotivism, Copp's Realist-Expressivism, and, in suitably modified form, Hare's Prescriptivism, I conclude that dual-use metaethical theories ought to have been—and ought still—to be taken far more seriously than they have thus far been taken. In the next chapter, I discuss several more reasons to think that Expressive-Assertivism is true.

⁹ More accurately, the hallmark of a dual-use metaethical theory is that a PL-utterance of a basic ethical sentence is the performance of more than one direct illocutionary act. This more general claim leaves room for Hare's Prescriptivism, according to which a PL-utterance of a basic ethical sentence is a direct assertive and a direct directive.

CHAPTER 4 THE STRENGTH OF EXPRESSIVE-ASSERTIVISM, PART II

Support from Other Parts of Natural Languages

Recall the three claims that comprise the heart of Expressive-Assertivism:

- (CT) If a speaker PL-utters a basic ethical sentence, S, then the speaker performs one direct expressive illocutionary act and one direct assertive illocutionary act.
- (EP) If a speaker PL-utters a sentence that contains an ethical predicate in an extensional context, then the speaker performs a direct expressive illocutionary act.
- (GP) If a speaker PL-utters a basic or complex ethical sentence, the speaker performs a direct expressive illocutionary act expressing some conative attitude toward things of a certain kind, viz., things that have the property picked out by the ethical predicate.

With the exception of how well Expressive-Assertivism solves The Moral Problem, the best reason to support Expressive-Assertivism is that (CT), (EP), and (GP) are modeled on three uncontroversial features of predicates from other parts of natural languages. Thus, Expressive-Assertivism is unsurprising, credible, and realistic. Most obviously, (CT), (EP), and (GP) are modeled on features of other evaluative predicates, especially what I will call "emotionally charged" predicates and so-called "thick" ethical predicates.

Consider the following emotionally charged predicates, which I have listed in order from those that, when used properly and literally, are used to express positive attitudes to those that, when used properly and literally, are used to express negative attitudes (including contempt): 'is beautiful', 'is a sweetheart', 'is an angel', 'is a saint', 'is a bozo', 'is a jerk', 'is a Yankee', 'is a frog', 'is a kraut', 'is a spic', 'is a towelhead', 'is a wop', 'is a kraut', 'is a nigger', 'is a Jesus-freak', and 'is a kike'. It is clear that if we fill in schema S_0 ,

S₀: Aurie _____,

with the predicates just listed, then a PL-utterance of the resulting sentences would be the performance of both a direct assertive, which describes Aurie as having a certain property, and a direct expressive, which expresses some favorable or unfavorable attitude of the speaker's. For example, if we fill in S₀ with 'is a wop', then it is clear that a PL-utterance of 'Aurie is a wop' is a direct assertive, which describes Aurie as having a certain property, viz., being of Italian descent, and a direct expressive, expressing the speaker's contempt. Moreover, it is clear that if we fill in schema S₀ with the predicates just listed, then the attitude expressed via a PL-utterance of the resulting sentences would be directed not just toward Aurie, but toward all people who have the property picked out by the emotionally charged predicate. For example, a PL-utterance of 'Aurie is a wop' is a direct expressive, and the contempt thereby expressed is directed toward not just Aurie, but toward all people of Italian descent.¹ Thus, a suitably modified (CT) and (GP) hold uncontroversially of emotionally charged predicates. It is also clear that if we fill in schemas S₁-S₆ with the predicates listed above, then the resulting embedded sentences retain their expressive function.

S₁: If I am correct, then Aurie is _____.

S₂: If Aurie is _____, then I am correct.

S₃: Aurie is _____, or (else) I've lost my bet.

S₄: It is possible that Aurie is _____.

S₅: Go ahead and be _____.

S₆: Is Aurie _____ ?

For example, it is uncontroversial that a speaker who PL-utters any of (1) to (6) is directly expressing contempt:

¹ As I will explain when discussing The Objection from Missing Expressives in Chapter 5, the attitude is not even directed toward Aurie, at least not directly, but is pragmatically inferred.

- (1) If I am correct, then Aurie is a wop.
- (2) If Aurie is a wop, then I am correct.
- (3) Aurie is a wop, or else I've lost my bet.
- (4) It is possible that Aurie is a wop.
- (5) Go ahead, Aurie, be a wop.
- (6) Is Aurie a wop?

Moreover, the contempt thereby expressed by a speaker in PL-uttering (1)-(6) is directed not just toward Aurie, but toward all people of Italian descent. Thus, a suitably modified (EP) also holds uncontroversially for emotionally charged predicates.

(CT), (EP), and (GP) are also modeled on so-called "thick" ethical predicates, which appear to have more "content," such as 'is just', 'is courageous', 'is kind', 'is generous', 'is industrious', 'is selfish', 'is dishonest', 'is lustful', 'is vile', etc. For example, it seems intuitively obvious that if a speaker PL-utters (7) or (8),

- (7) Aurie is courageous
- (8) Aurie is dishonest

then the speaker performs a direct assertive describing Aurie, in (7), as being able to take action in the face of fear and, in (8), as having a disposition to not tell the truth, and a direct expressive expressing, in (7), a favorable attitude and, in (8), a negative attitude. Moreover, these attitudes appear to be directed not just toward Aurie, but toward all people who have these respective properties, and to be directly expressed even when these thick ethical predicates appear in extensional contexts, such as in (9) and (10).

- (9) If I am correct, then Aurie is courageous.
- (10) It is possible that Aurie is dishonest.

Thus, a suitably modified (CT), (EP), and (GP) also hold uncontroversially for thick ethical predicates, as well as for emotionally charged predicates.

Since a suitably modified (CT), (EP), and (GP) hold for the range of evaluative predicates consisting of emotionally charged and thick ethical predicates, it would be

unsurprising if they also hold for all ethical predicates. Indeed, it might be surprising if they did *not* hold for ethical predicates.

Translation Thought Experiments

Expressive-Assertivism also gains support from certain thought experiments about translations of ethical predicates. For example, suppose we meet up with a historically isolated culture of people that, amazingly, has developed a language that looks and sounds exactly like English. Indeed, we notice that all their referring terms are orthographically and audibly identical with the corresponding English referring terms, and even refer to the same people, actions, and so on as the corresponding English referring terms. Similarly, we notice that all of their predicates, logical connectives, noun phrases, etc. appear to be orthographically and audibly identical to English predicates, logical connectives, noun phrases, etc., and appear to mean the same as their English counterparts. For example, they apply the predicate 'is right' to all of those actions to which we would apply the English 'is right'—donating to charity, paying off one's debts, helping the elderly gentleman to cross the street, and so on—and apply the predicate 'is wrong' to all of those actions to which we would apply the English predicate 'is wrong'—lying, causing harm to innocent people, lighting cats on fire, cutting off someone's arms just see what she looks like, etc. However, as time passes, we come to realize something odd about those acts to which those in the (heretofore) isolated culture apply these predicates. It turns out that all of the acts to which these people apply the predicate 'is right' are those which they *despise*, teach their children to avoid, feel shame when they perform them, etc. For example, they despise making donations to charity, paying off one's debts, helping people to cross the street, and so on. Moreover, we come to discover that all of the acts to which they apply the predicate 'is wrong' are those which they

greatly *admire*, imitate, teach their children to perform, feel proud when they perform them, etc. The important question is this: would we translate their 'is right' and 'is wrong' into English as 'is right' and 'is wrong'? Intuitively, we would not translate their 'is right' and 'is wrong' into the English 'is right' and 'is wrong', which strongly suggests that proper and literal uses of the English predicates 'is right' and 'is wrong' require speakers to have favorable or unfavorable attitudes respectively. This strongly suggests, in turn, that a PL-utterance of a basic ethical sentence is, at least in part, the performance of a direct expressive illocutionary act. Although they introduce them for somewhat different purposes, Dreier and Foot introduce thought experiments from which we can derive the same conclusion (Dreier 1990, p. 13; Foot 1977).

These translation thought experiments should not be pressed into more service than they can adequately handle. There could a number of plausible reasons why we would not translate their 'is right' and 'is wrong' as the English 'is right' and 'is wrong'. For example, perhaps there is some pragmatic information concerning appropriate attitudes that is usually conveyed by the use of the English ethical predicates which is not so conveyed by the use of the other culture's ethical predicates, and so translating their ethical predicates into the English counterparts would be misleading. However, as with all putative pragmatic explanations, the burden rests with those advancing such explanations to provide a reasonable explanation of how such pragmatic information would be conveyed. In the absence of such a story, we should conclude, even if tentatively, that a speaker performs a direct expressive illocutionary act when PL-uttering a basic ethical sentence.

A Robust View of Truth

Expressive-Assertivism is consistent with whatever is the correct view about the nature of truth and, so, does not require the acceptance of any particular view about truth. Most importantly, it does not require the acceptance of Minimalism about truth, a controversial view according to which there is nothing, as it were, "substantial," "robust," or philosophically interesting to say about truth.

According to traditional theories of truth, truth is something philosophically interesting, or robust. Horwich, although a minimalist about truth, summarizes nicely what is common to all robust theories of truth:

[The central idea behind all robust theories of truth] is the natural and widespread idea that the property of truth has some sort of underlying nature and that our problem as philosophers is to say what that nature is, to analyze truth either conceptually or substantively, to specify, at least roughly, the conditions necessary and sufficient for something to be true. Among the products of this traditional point of view there is the correspondence theory (x is true *iff* x corresponds to a fact), the coherence theory (x is true *iff* x is a member of a coherent set of beliefs), the verificationist theory (x is true *iff* x is provable, or verifiable in ideal conditions), and the pragmatist theory (x is true *iff* x is useful to believe).² (Horwich 1999, p. 239)

Thus, to take a correspondence theory as our example, there is something philosophically interesting about the truth of a belief (or sentence, proposition, assertive, etc.), namely, that a belief (or sentence, proposition, assertion, etc.) corresponds to something about the world, i.e., that truth is a *relation* between two relata: a belief (or sentence, proposition, assertive, etc.) and something about the world, like a fact or state of affairs. To use another example, pragmatists believe that there is something philosophically interesting

² Horwich continues thus: "But nothing of this sort has ever survived serious scrutiny—which comes as no surprise to the deflationist, who denies that there is any prospect of an explicit definition or reductive analysis of truth, even a very approximate one" (Horwich 1999, p. 239).

about the truth of a belief, namely that it is *useful*, and that there is something philosophically interesting about the truth of a sentence, proposition, assertion, etc., namely, that it is *useful to believe*. As Horwich himself admits, a robust view of truth is the "natural" view, since it seems intuitively obvious that when we say of a sentence, belief, proposition, assertive, etc. that it is true, we are describing that belief, etc. as having a certain property. Thus, the central aim of theory of truth, at least as traditionally conceived, is to articulate what is philosophically interesting about this property. Because a robust view of truth is so intuitively compelling, I take it to be the default view of truth, one we should reject only in the face of convincing arguments to do so.

"Minimalist" theories of truth hold that the traditional aim of a theory of truth is misguided. As Blackburn and Simmons write,

This [minimalist] view denies that there is an issue of 'the nature of truth in general'. After that, the rejection of any entirely abstract questions about the nature of truth can be phrased in different ways. It has been expressed by saying that truth is not a 'real' property, or a 'robust' or metaphysically interesting property, or even that 'is true' is not a predicate at all. At their most flamboyant, [minimalists] have maintained that the concept of truth is 'redundant', or that talk in terms of truth is purely 'formal', so that the forms of words in which we say that something is true merely represent 'devices' with various logical purposes. The details of how to formulate a general [Minimalism] matter. . . . But all such views agree that a general inquiry into the nature of truth as an abstract property is wrongheaded. (Blackburn 1999, p. 3)

The reason a general inquiry into the nature of truth is "wrongheaded" is that, according to Minimalists, there is nothing philosophically interesting to say about truth, since truth is not, as it were, a "substantive" property. Blackburn and Simmons, writing on behalf of Minimalists, compare truth to existence.

We talked of truth along with existence as reaching the heights of abstraction. When we approach these heights, the air becomes very thin indeed. Perhaps it becomes too thin to support philosophical reflection at all. If we asked 'what is existence, in general?' many philosophers might suppose that we have gone too far, so that while we might reasonably address the question of what the world must be

like for stones or minds or penguins to exist, no entirely general question about 'what it is to exist' can be posed or addressed. At best, we might say something about the utility of an entirely general word, 'exists', ready to combine with particular noun phrases and perhaps other terms, so that we can frame intelligible thoughts about particular propositions: tame tigers exist, Santa Claus does not exist. And if this seems the right way to go here, it might also commend itself in the case of truth. Perhaps there is nothing in general to say about truth in general, although there will be things to say about particular truths, such as that they are important, or trivial, or interesting, or boring, or that some are more basic than others, or that they do or do not depend upon particular features of the world. (Blackburn 1999, p. 3)

Thus, we find Minimalists writing that: "[T]ruth is not the sort of thing one should expect to have a philosophically interesting theory about" (Rorty 1982, p. xiii); "What does seem right about Tarski's approach is its deflationist character. . . . Truth is a useful notion, but it is not the key to what there is, or to how we represent the world to ourselves through language" (Soames 1984, p. 429); and "[T]he realism/anti-realism issue (together with various related issues in the philosophy of science) have nothing at all to do with truth" (Horwich 1990, p. 54).³

Expressivist theories, especially Simple-Expressivist theories, are pressured to reject traditional, robust theories of truth and, *ipso facto*, to accept Minimalism about truth in order to explain why ethical sentences appear to have truth values. For example, as we will see in the next chapter, basic ethical sentences can be embedded as complement clauses in truth-ascriptions, such as 'It is true that donating to charity is right' and 'The sentence "Donating to charity is right" is true', and so it appears that something substantive and interesting is being said about acts of donating to charity. However, according to many Expressivist theories, such as Blackburn's Projectivism and Gibbard's

³ These three quotes were found in Anil Gupta's informative article "A Critique of Deflationism" (Gupta 1999).

Norm Expressivism, ethical sentences are used only to express attitudes, and not to describe the world. Thus, if a robust theory is correct, Expressivism appears to be committed to the view that ethical sentences do not have a truth value and, hence, appears to be committed to something that is false.

Some Expressivists respond to this difficulty by rejecting traditional notions of truth, thereby invoking Minimalism about truth. We saw in the last chapter that Blackburn's Projectivism is an Expressivist theory that accepts Minimalism about truth. Thus, Blackburn's Projectivism is committed to a controversial view of truth. Some Expressivist theories, such as Gibbard's Norm Expressivism, resist the pressure to reject traditional view of truth. The cost of doing so, however, is to explain away as illusory the intuitively plausible claim that, in attributing truth to basic ethical sentences, we are describing the sentences as having a certain property, or saying something that is of significant philosophical interest. Thus, Gibbard's Norm Expressivism, and other Simple Expressivist theories that accept a traditional view of truth, also appear to be committed to something that is false.

Expressive-Assertivism is consistent with Minimalism about truth. Thus, if in the fullness of time, we come to see that Minimalism about truth is indeed the correct view of truth, Expressive-Assertivism is none the worse for it. However, because Expressive-Assertivism holds that ethical sentences *are* used to describe the world, it is quite capable of accepting a more robust notion of truth. For example, because Expressive-Assertivism holds that a PL-utterance of 'Donating to charity is right' is, in part, the performance of a direct assertive and, hence, that basic ethical sentences are used to describe the world, Expressive-Assertivism can accept, say, a correspondence theory of truth. On such a

view, the sentence 'Donating to charity is right' is true if and only if the world is as described. Thus, Expressive-Assertivism is not forced to accept a Minimalist theory of truth or to explain away as illusory the intuitively compelling claim that we are saying something philosophically interesting when we ascribe truth to basic ethical sentences. An Expressivist theory that is not committed to either of these controversial views is preferable, *mutatis mutandis*, to one that is, and so Expressive-Assertivism is preferable, *mutatis mutandis*, to most other Expressivist theories.

A Naturalist View of Moral Properties

As we saw in the last chapter, some Assertivist theories, in order to account for the Practicality of Ethics, are pressured to accept a view according to which moral properties have some remarkable feature that accounts for the data that supports Practicality. According to Moore, for example, moral properties are metaphysically unlike any property that is detectable by the senses or accounted for in the natural sciences. That is, Moore held a view according to which moral properties are "nonnatural." Mackie claimed that moral properties necessarily motivate everyone who comes to believe that acts have these properties and, because no property that is detectable by the senses or accounted for in the natural sciences could have such a power, moral properties are nonnatural properties. Smith holds that moral properties are natural properties, but are such that, necessarily, all fully rational people would approve (or disapprove) of those acts that have the moral properties.

All of these views about the nature of moral properties are views that attempt to explain what Expressivists can explain rather simply—speakers directly express attitudes when PL-uttering an ethical sentence. Thus, although Expressive-Assertivism holds that speakers describe an act as having a certain property when PL-uttering a basic ethical

sentence, it does not need to account for the data that suggest Practicality by holding that moral properties have some very special feature. Most importantly, it is not pressured to hold that moral properties are undetectable by the senses and unaccounted for in the natural sciences. Thus, similar to its commitments about the nature of truth, Expressive-Assertivism is not forced to accept a view according to which moral properties are nonnatural properties or a view according to which natural properties have some surprising feature. Of course, if in the fullness of time, it becomes clear that moral properties are nonnatural, then Expressive-Assertivism is none the worse for it. However, since Expressive-Assertivism can account for the data that suggest Practicality without accepting such views of moral properties, and since there is no good reason as of yet to concede that moral properties are nonnatural or have some very remarkable feature, Expressive-Assertivism is not forced into accepting such controversial views of moral properties. An Assertivist theory that is not committed to controversial views of moral properties is preferable, *mutatis mutandis*, to one that is, and so, Expressive-Assertivism is, *mutatis mutandis*, preferable to most other Assertivist theories.

This chapter concludes my discussion of the positive reasons in favor of Expressive-Assertivism. In the next chapter, I support the claim that Expressive-Assertivism does not raise any significant difficulties by responding to a number of objections that arise from the possibility of embedding basic ethical sentences within more complex sentences. We will see that this family of objections, which are usually grouped together under the label "The Embedding Objection," is thought by many to be the most powerful objection to any Expressivist theory. However, I will show that Expressive-Assertivism can respond rather easily to what I take to be the five most

forceful of these objections. I take Expressive-Assertivism's ability to respond so easily to what are thought to be the most powerful objections to any Expressivist theory as evidence that it would be able to respond adequately to other, less forceful objections.

CHAPTER 5

"THE EMBEDDING OBJECTION"

Recall that Expressivism is the view that (E) is true.

- (E) If a speaker PL-utters a basic ethical sentence, then the speaker performs a direct expressive illocutionary act.

(E) is silent about whether the direct expressive performed is the only direct illocutionary act performed via a PL-utterance of a basic ethical sentence. Hence, Expressive-Assertivism, Stevenson's Emotivism, Copp's Realist-Expressivism, Gibbard's Norm-Expressivism, and Blackburn's Projectivism are all Expressivist theories, according to my definition of 'Expressivism'. Hare's Prescriptivism is not, since it endorses the view that a speaker performs a direct directive, rather than a direct expressive, if a speaker PL-utters a basic ethical sentence. This characterization of Expressivism thus differs from some others in the literature according to which Expressivism is the view that ethical sentences do not have robust truth conditions and that ethical sentences are not used to describe the world.¹ Such a view I call "Nonassertivism."

Expressivism (and Hare's Prescriptivism) has been thought to face serious problems arising from the possibility of embedding ethical sentences within more complex sentences. Geach, in a series of articles published in the 1950's and 1960's, was the first to stress the difficulties that Expressivism faces from the possibility of such embeddings

¹ See, for example, Stoljar (1993) and Sinnott-Armstrong (2000) who use this characterization of 'Expressivism'.

(1958; 1960; 1965).² Since then, Copp (2001a, pp. 16-18), Darwall et al. (1997, p. 19), Dreier (1996), Sayre-McCord (1988, p. 9), Sinnott-Armstrong (2000), Stoljar (1993) and Timmons (1999, p. 159-164), to name just a few, have all claimed that such embeddings are the source of one of the most serious difficulties facing Expressivists, and Blackburn (1993a), Gibbard (1990, p. 92, 96-99), and Hare (1970) have all taken the difficulties seriously. However, *what* difficulties arise for Expressivists from such embeddings and the *magnitude* of these difficulties is (much) less widely recognized. Two factors contribute to this obscurity. First, these difficulties are often lumped together under some sort of definite description such as "the embedding objection" or "the problem of embedding." Even Darwall et al., Dreier, and Sinnott-Armstrong, who are some of the few to explicitly recognize that there are actually a *number* of *distinct* difficulties surrounding the embedding of ethical sentences, use the descriptions "the problem of ethical terms in complex grammatical contexts" (Darwall et al., 1997, p. 16), "the embedding problem" (Dreier 1996, p. 30), and "the problem of embedding" (Sinnott Armstrong 2000, p. 677) respectively. These definite descriptions are misleading. The definite article is misleading, since there are, as far as I can tell, at least *eight* different difficulties faced by Expressivists with regard to various embeddings of ethical sentences within more complex sentences. Furthermore, some of these difficulties, such as what Sinnott-Armstrong calls "The Deepest Problem of Embedding" (2000, p. 688), are not fundamentally about the *embedding* of ethical sentences at all. Moreover, several

² In attributing this insight to Frege, Geach appears to be relying on Frege's distinction between the content of a sentence and what we would now call the force with which that propositional content is used. I don't see at all how the insight, which in fact pre-dates Frege, gives insight into the problem of embedding sentences within more complex sentences. So, I think in fact that the original insight into this problem was Geach's.

authors, including Dreier (1996), conceive of these difficulties not so much as *objections* to Expressivism, but as evidence that expressivist theories contain a lacuna that requires filling, without thereby suggesting that doing so is impossible or even difficult. There is ample evidence that these definite descriptions are in fact misleading. For example, most discussions of "the embedding objection" center on only one or two of the difficulties for Expressivists arising from the possibility of embedding ethical sentences within conditionals, without recognizing that there are other, perhaps even more pressing, difficulties. The second factor contributing to the obscurity of the content and magnitude of the difficulties faced by Expressivists with respect to the possibility of embedding ethical sentences within more complex sentences is that there are at least several plausible kinds of Expressivism, including Simple Expressivism that accepts Minimalism about truth (e.g., Blackburn's Projectivism), Simple Expressivism that accepts a robust notion of truth (e.g., Gibbard's Norm-Expressivism), Dual-Use Expressivism that accepts Minimalism about truth (possibly Stevenson's Emotivism), and Dual-Use Expressivism that accepts a robust notion of truth (e.g., Expressive-Assertivism), none of which is susceptible to every difficulty. Hence, it is not always clear which kinds of Expressivism are affected by the various difficulties. In this chapter, I distinguish what I take to be the five most difficult embedding objections, show how each of these objections can be forcefully directed toward Expressive-Assertivism, and defend Expressive-Assertivism from each of these objections. I conclude that Expressive-Assertivism is immune from each objection.

Before proceeding, however, it is important to notice that there can be no *in principle* objection to the embedding of sentences that have an expressive function within

more complex sentences. Although such an *in principle* objection is often tacitly assumed by those wielding the different embedding objections, including Geach, this assumption *must* be false, since such an objection would prove far too much. For, it is clear that, for a large range of sentences that have an expressive function, these sentences retain this function even when embedded in more complex sentences, and even when embedded within nonindicative sentences. Recall our discussion in last chapter. It is clear that if we fill in schemas S₁-S₆ with the expressions 'beautiful', 'a sweetheart', 'an angel', 'a saint', 'a bozo', 'a jerk', 'a Yankee', 'a frog', 'a kraut', 'a spic', 'a towelhead', 'a wop', 'a kraut', 'a nigger', 'a Jesus-freak', and 'a kike', the resulting embedded sentences retain their expressive function.

- S₁: If I am correct, then Aurie is _____.
- S₂: If Aurie is _____, then I am correct.
- S₃: Aurie is _____, or (else) I've lost my bet.
- S₄: It is possible that Aurie is _____.
- S₅: Go ahead and be _____.
- S₆: Is Aurie _____ ?

Because the resulting embedded sentences retain their expressive function when embedded, there must be a semantic story that explains this data. The trick for Expressivists, then, is to uncover the correct semantic story for these embeddings, and to determine whether they can use it to supplement their metaethical theories. I have tried to do just this in spelling out Expressive-Assertivism. Thus, there can be no *in principle* objection to the embedding of sentences that retain their expressive function when embedded, and any objection to Expressivism on such grounds must be directed toward the specific semantic account offered by Expressivists. We will come back to this important point as we proceed through the chapter.

Objection 1: The Objection from Truth- and Fact-Ascriptions

Basic ethical sentences can be embedded as sentences in truth- and fact-ascriptions, such as 'It is truth that _____' and 'It is a fact that _____'. According to the Objection from Truth- and Fact-Ascriptions, Expressivism must be false, since it entails that basic ethical sentences cannot be embedded as complement clauses in truth- or fact-ascriptions, contrary to fact. The main thoughts behind this objection are that sentences are embeddable as complement clauses in truth- or fact-ascriptions only if the sentences are truth-evaluable, but Expressivism is committed to the view that basic ethical sentences are not truth-evaluable. The argument is as follows:

- (1) Basic ethical sentences can be embedded as complement clauses in truth- or fact-ascriptions [Empirical truth]
 - (2) Expressivist theories tell us that PL-utterances of basic ethical sentences are the performances of direct expressives [Def. of 'Expressivism']
 - (3) If PL-utterances of basic ethical sentences are the performances of direct expressives, then basic ethical sentences are not truth-evaluable [Tacit assumption]
- Therefore,
- (4) Basic ethical sentences are not truth-evaluable [(2) and (3)]
 - (5) Sentences can be embedded as complement clauses in truth- or fact-ascriptions only if they are truth-evaluable [Tacit assumption]
- Therefore,
- (6) Basic ethical sentences cannot be embedded as complement clauses in truth- or fact-ascriptions [(4) and (5)]
- Therefore,
- (7) Expressivism is false [Contradiction, (1) and (6)]

This objection is most forcefully directed to Simple Expressivist theories, since, in order to defend themselves from this objection, these expressivist theories have to endorse claims that are either controversial or incompatible with the theories. Blackburn would defend his Projectivism from this objection by rejecting (3), since he holds a Minimalist theory of truth. To the Minimalist, recall, there is nothing surprising about embedding basic ethical sentences in such contexts, since nothing philosophically

interesting is going on when basic ethical sentences are embedded in them. That is, nothing is being "added" to the judgment made in PL-uttering a basic ethical sentence by PL-uttering a basic ethical sentence that is embedded in truth- or fact-ascriptions. As Blackburn writes, echoing Ramsey,

Because of the Minimalism, we can have for free what look like a ladder of philosophical ascent: 'p', 'it is true that p', 'it is really and truly a fact that p' . . . , for none of these terms, in Ramsey's view, marks an addition to the additional judgment. You can as easily make the last judgment as the first—Ramsey's ladder is lying on the ground, horizontal. (Blackburn 1998, p. 78)

Perhaps Stevenson would also defend himself from Objection 1 by invoking a Minimalist conception of truth (Stevenson 1963, pp. 214-220). Thus, some expressivist theories defend themselves from Objection 1 by invoking a Minimalist theory of truth, and I take it to be uncontroversial that Minimalism about truth *is* controversial. So, in defending themselves from this objection, some Expressivist theories are committed to a controversial view of truth.

It is unclear to me how a Simple Expressivist who accepts a robust notion of truth, such as Gibbard, can respond to Objection 1. As far as I can tell, Gibbard never responds to this objection, and it is unclear how he would do so, except by rejecting (5). For example, Gibbard could hold that sentences can be embedded in truth- and fact-ascriptions even if they are not truth-evaluable, if he also held that 'it is true that' and 'it is a fact that' are merely linguistic devices that serve *only* some kind of endorsing function, such as allowing the speaker to emphasize what would be articulated by PL-uttering the basic ethical sentence itself. For example, Gibbard could hold that what is expressed by a PL-utterance of 'Donating to charity is right'—i.e., some kind of acceptance—is exactly what is expressed by a PL-utterance of 'It is true that donating to charity is right', only the attitude of acceptance is expressed more emphatically. Unfortunately, invoking the claim

that 'it is true that' and 'it is possible that' are *merely* linguistic devices to register a speaker's emphasis appears to be nothing more than invoking Minimalism—something Gibbard clearly does not do.

Expressive-Assertivism can defend itself rather easily from Objection 1 by rejecting (3), although it does not need to do so at the cost of accepting Minimalism about truth. What allows Expressive-Assertivism to reject (3) while maintaining a robust view of truth is that it is a dual-use Expressivist theory. Hence, Expressive-Assertivism can claim that (3) is false, not because it invokes Minimalism about truth, but because it holds that a PL-utterance of a basic ethical sentence is a direct expressive *and* a direct assertive. Hence, basic ethical sentences have representational or descriptive content, and hence, are truth-evaluable, even according to a robust theory of truth.

Objection 2: The Objection from Missing Exclamations

A complex ethical sentence is a sentence that contains a basic ethical sentence as one of its component sentences, e.g.,

- (8) If donating to charity is right, then I'll get my wallet.
- (9) That is a lie and lying is wrong.
- (10) It is possible that lying is wrong.

According to The Objection from Missing Exclamations, which is sometimes conflated with Objection 3, there is a heavy burden on Expressivist theories to account for why it is grammatically appropriate for ethical sentences to appear in complex ethical sentences, though it is not appropriate for exclamations—sentences which paradigmatically are used to perform direct expressives—to appear in these contexts. According to Expressive-Assertivism, a speaker performs both a direct expressive and a direct assertive via a PL-utterance of a basic ethical sentence. Thus, Expressive-Assertivism shoulders this burden rather easily. The grammatical contexts that are thought to raise difficulties for

Expressivists require sentences whose PL-utterances are the performances of direct assertives and, therefore, have representational or descriptive content. Expressive-Assertivism holds that PL-utterances of basic ethical sentences are, in part, the performances of direct assertives and, hence, basic ethical sentences have descriptive content. However, PL-utterances of exclamations are not the performances of direct assertives, and hence, exclamations do not have descriptive content. Therefore, basic ethical sentences have, but exclamations do not have, descriptive content; therefore, basic ethical sentences can, but exclamations cannot, appear in these contexts.

Objection 3: The Objection from Missing Expressives

The Challenge from Missing Expressives is closely related to The Objection from Missing Exclamations. According to this objection, if all an Expressivist theory tells us is that the PL-utterance of an ethical sentence is a direct expressive, then the theory is severely incomplete, since the theory is silent about many uses of ethical sentences, specifically, the uses of ethical sentences when embedded in more complex sentences. The thought behind this objection is that it appears that no expressive is performed when ethical sentences appear in sentences such as (8)-(10). For example, according to this objection, if a speaker utters (8), the speaker does not express an attitude, despite the use of the basic ethical sentence in the antecedent. The argument is as follows:

- (11) Expressivist theories tell us only that PL-utterances of basic ethical sentences involve the performance of a direct expressive.
- (12) The performance of a direct expressive is an act in which the speaker expresses an attitude.
- (13) For a large number of uses of basic ethical sentences, no attitude is expressed by the speaker.

Therefore

- (14) Expressivist theories do not tell us anything about basic ethical sentences for many uses of them. (11-13)

Therefore,

- (15) Expressivist theories are radically incomplete. (14)

This objection fails for several reasons, but I want to focus on (13), intuitive support for which provides the force of this objection, as well as several other embedding objections. There are two ways of understanding (13), both of which lead to the conclusion that this objection is unsound, either because (14) does not follow from (11)-(13), or because (13) is false. If we consider the sentence 'Donating to charity is right' as it appears in (8) and ask whether a speaker, in PL-uttering (8), is expressing an attitude, it may seem that the answer is 'No'. What is driving our intuitions in this case? I suggest that, in this case, it is a reading of 'expressing an attitude' as 'expressing an attitude *toward donating to charity*'. So understood, I accept and share these intuitions. Suppose, however, we ask whether a speaker, in PL-uttering (8), is expressing an attitude *toward things of a general kind*, specifically, things that have the property *rightness*. In this case, intuitively, the answer is 'Yes'—the speaker does express such an attitude. As we saw in Chapter 4, this feature comes out strongly when we consider the entire range of evaluative terms and sentences in which these terms are used. For example, it is intuitively clear that a speaker who utters any of (16) to (22) is expressing contempt not just toward Aurie, but toward all people of Italian decent.

- (16) Aurie is a wop.
- (17) If Aurie is a wop, then she probably vacations in Italy.
- (18) If Aurie vacations in Italy, then she is a wop.
- (19) Aurie does not have a lot of garlic in her refrigerator or (else) she is a wop.
- (20) It is possible that Aurie is a wop.
- (21) Go ahead, Aurie, be a wop.
- (22) Is Aurie a wop?

Recall also that this feature comes out strongly when we consider thick ethical terms, i.e., those ethical terms that appear to have more "content," such as 'just', 'kind', 'generous', 'industrious', 'selfish', 'lustful', 'vile', etc. For example, it seems intuitively

obvious that if a speaker PL-utters (23) or (24), then the speaker is expressing either a positive or negative attitude toward anything that has the properties *kindness* or *vileness* respectively.

(23) If I am correct, then Aurie is kind.

(24) It is possible that Aurie is vile.

I am claiming, then, that Expressive-Assertivism can be defended from the Objection from Missing Expressives by first recognizing a distinction between 'no attitude is expressed toward the subject of the (basic ethical) sentence' and 'no attitude is expressed toward things that have the property picked out by the ethical predicate'. If, in (13), 'no attitude is expressed by the speaker' is intended to mean the former, then (13) is true, but the objection is unsound, since (14) does not follow from (11)–(13). If, in (13), 'no attitude is expressed by the speaker' is intended to mean the latter, then (13) is false, and hence, this objection is still unsound.

According to Expressive-Assertivism, then, if a speaker PL-utters (8), then the speaker performs a direct (complex) assertive, *viz.*, that if donating to charity has the property picked out by 'is right', then the speaker will grab his or her wallet, and performs a direct expressive expressing some kind of positive attitude toward things that have the property picked out by 'is right'. More generally, Expressive-Assertivism accepts as fundamental the idea that any sentence—basic or complex—in which an ethical predicate is used in an extensional context, when PL-uttered, is always used to directly express a psychological attitude toward things that have the property picked out by the predicate. These features, you will recall, are the Extensionality and Generality Principles. Thus, according to Expressive-Assertivism, whether a speaker PL-utters (25) or (26), a speaker

performs a direct expressive expressing some positive attitude toward things that have the property picked out by 'is right'.

(25) Donating to charity is right.

(26) If I have thought matters through correctly, donating to charity is right.

One might object that the Generality Principle is too general, on the grounds that, even if it were agreed that *some* attitude is directly expressed via a PL-utterance of (25), the attitude expressed by the speaker appears to be directed toward the act of donating to charity, not toward whatever has the property picked out by 'is right'. However, Expressive-Assertivism has a plausible explanation for this intuition ready to hand: since the speaker is directly expressing a positive attitude toward things that have the property picked out by the predicate 'is right', and since the speaker is also directly asserting that the act of donating to charity has this property, we easily infer that the speaker has this positive attitude toward the act of donating to charity. Thus, Expressive-Assertivism explains this intuition on plausible pragmatic grounds, an explanation that is consistent with our intuitions about sentences like (16).

Objection 4: The Objection from Incomplete Semantics

According to The Objection from Incomplete Semantics, there is a lacuna in many expressivist theories, since many are not "semantically robust" enough to show how we can understand the meanings of complex ethical sentences. The idea is that any metaethical theory that does not tell us how we can understand the meanings of complex ethical sentences is incomplete, and since many Expressivist theories do not tell us how we can understand the meanings of complex ethical sentences, many Expressivist theories are, therefore, incomplete.

Something like this objection is at the heart of Dreier's "Bob is Hiyo! Objection", (Dreier 1996) the spirit of which Dreier attributes to Geach (1958; 1960; 1965) and Searle (1969, pp. 136-141). Dreier's explicit targets are Expressivists that accept Minimalism about truth, since these theories cannot use a Tarski-style truth theory to explain how we can understand the meanings of complex sentences on the basis of understanding the meanings of their component sentences, logical connectives, and syntactic combination. Hence, these Expressivist theories are required to provide some other compositional semantic account of how to understand complex ethical sentences. Although Expressive-Assertivism holds that basic ethical sentences have robust truth conditions, Objection 4 might be raised against it as well, since Expressive-Assertivism holds that ethical sentences have an expressive component.

My response has three parts. First, I deny that Expressivists have any special difficulty here that others do not also have, for, as I mentioned earlier, it is clear that there is a whole range of complex sentences whose embedded sentences retain their expressive function when embedded. Hence, if a compositional semantic theory is required in order to understand the complete meanings, i.e., the truth-conditional and expressive meanings, of complex sentences on the basis of understanding their component sentences, logical connectives, and their combination, there must be one, and the burden to uncover it falls on everyone, not just on Expressivists. Moreover, the correct semantic theory might be one that Expressivists can use, if all the other parts of their respective theories are consistent with the correct theory. Thus, to the extent that Objection 4 is a significant objection, it cannot be an *in principle* objection. Rather, it must be an objection that is directed toward the specific details of the various Expressivist theories.

Second, if Objection 4 is to be a significant objection to Expressive-Assertivism, it cannot be a challenge to Expressive-Assertivism to provide a compositional semantic account of the truth-conditional meanings of complex ethical sentences, since Expressive-Assertivism accepts that ethical sentences have robust truth conditions. Hence, Expressive-Assertivism can adopt a semantic theory that uses a Tarski-style truth theory to explain how we can understand the truth-conditional meanings of complex ethical sentences on the basis of understanding the truth conditional meanings of its component sentences, logical connectives, and their syntactic combination. Therefore, if this objection is to be effective against Expressive-Assertivism at all, it must be challenging Expressive-Assertivism to provide a compositional semantic account of the expressive meanings of complex ethical sentences. That is, this might be a significant objection to Expressive-Assertivism, if, in providing a compositional semantic theory to explain how we understand the complete meanings of ethical sentences on the basis of understanding the complete meanings of its component sentences, logical connectives, and their syntactic combination, it is necessary to provide a compositional semantic theory to explain how we understand the expressive meanings of ethical sentences on the basis of understanding the expressive meanings of its component expressions.

However—and this is the third part of my response—I reject this assumption. It is possible to provide a compositional semantic theory for the complete meaning of a complex ethical sentence without providing a compositional semantic theory for the expressive meaning of a complex ethical sentence. Recall that, according to Expressive-Assertivism, if a speaker PL-utters an ethical sentence (in an extensional context), whether basic or complex, the speaker performs a direct expressive. If the PL-utterance

of a sentence is the performance of a direct expressive, then that sentence has expressive meaning. Since a complete compositional semantic theory finitely specifies all those things one would have to know in order to understand the complete meaning of any sentence in the language, a complete semantic theory must finitely specify all those things one would have to know in order to understand the expressive meaning. All one has to know in order to understand the expressive meaning of a sentence is that some specific conative attitude is expressed, whenever an ethical predicate is used in an extensional context, along with an account of what the specific attitude is.³ No compositional theory for expressive meaning is necessary in order to know this. That is, all one has to know in order to grasp the expressive meaning of a sentence in which an ethical predicate is used (in an extensional context) is that the speaker expresses an attitude when PL-uttering the sentence and what kind of attitude is expressed. But we can do this merely by pairing the different ethical predicates with the specific attitudes a speaker expresses when PL-uttering sentences containing them and, then, state that an utterance of any sentence containing the predicate *expresses that* (rather than *means that*) the speaker has the requisite attitude. This is all the machinery that is needed in order to specify the expressive meaning of either 'Donating to charity is right' or 'If donating to charity is right, I'll get my wallet'. Both sentences, when PL-uttered, are used to express some kind of conative attitude (say, approval) toward things that have the property *rightness*. Thus, we can understand the expressive meaning of the latter sentence without doing so *on the basis* of understanding the expressive meaning of the antecedent.

³ Sinnott-Armstrong argues otherwise. See (Sinnott Armstrong 2000).

Expressive-Assertivism adopts such a semantic theory and, hence, is able to respond The Objection from Incomplete Meanings.

Objection 5: The Objection from Ambiguity of Attitude-Attribution Verbs

Attitude-attribution verbs, such as 'believes that', 'fears that', 'wonders whether', etc. are used to attribute psychological states (belief, fear, wonderment, etc.) whose contents are given by the sentences used in their complements. For example, in (27),

(27) John believes that Jackie is a lawyer

'believes that' is used to attribute to John a representational state (belief) whose content is that Jackie is a lawyer. Ethical sentences can also appear as complement sentences of attitude-attribution verbs. If Expressivism is correct, then ethical sentences have an expressive component. The question arises whether having this expressive component of ethical sentences plays a role in their use in complement sentences of attitude reports, specifically, a role in determining what kind of psychological state is attributed by the use of these verbs. For Simple Expressivism, it is hard to see how the answer could fail to be 'Yes', for there is nothing more to their content than what they express. So, it appears that, in (28),

(28) John believes that donating to charity is right

'believes that' is used to attribute to John some kind of positive conative state, rather than some kind of representational state. Thus, it appears that Simple Expressivism has to hold that attitude-attribution verbs are ambiguous, sometimes attributing a representational state to the subject of the sentence in which they appear, sometimes attributing a conative state, depending on whether the complement sentence is an ethical sentence. Intuitively, however, these verbs are not ambiguous, so Simple Expressivism

appears to be committed to something that is false. This objection is raised by Copp.

Objecting to Gibbard's Norm Expressivism, he writes,

Gibbard's account implies that various sentential contexts in which a sentence *p* can be embedded are ambiguous, with their semantics depending on whether *p* is normative. A cognitivist theory could avoid this kind of complexity. For example, if *p* is not normative, a sentence of the form 'S knows that *p*' expresses a relation between S and the proposition expressed by *p*. Similarly, a sentence of the form 'It is possible that *p*' expresses a proposition about the proposition expressed by *p*. And a sentence of the form, 'If *p* then *q*', expresses a proposition concerning a relation between the propositions expressed by *p* and *q*. But if *p* is normative, matters are otherwise, for *p* does not express a proposition. A variety of complex constructions give rise to problems, since it appears that a non-cognitivist theory must treat them differently, depending on whether an embedded sentence is or is not one that would standardly be used to make a normative claim. (Copp 2001a, p. 17)

And Jeffrey King has suggested to Copp that matters are even worse for Expressivists when one attends to molecular complement sentences containing both ethical and nonethical sentences (Copp 2001a, p. 17, ft. 29).

Although this objection is directed toward Simple Expressivist theories, it might well be directed toward Expressive-Assertivism, since, according to Expressive-Assertivism, moral judgments or moral beliefs are complex psychological states consisting of a representational state and a conative state. Thus, if a sentence's having an expressive component plays a role in determining the kind of psychological state attributed by the use of attitude-attribution verbs, an objection might be raised against Expressive-Assertivism that the theory entails that these verbs are ambiguous, sometimes attributing a simple representational psychological state, and sometimes attributing a complex psychological state with representational and conative components, depending on whether its complement sentence is an ethical sentence. Roughly, the argument would go as follows:

- (29) 'believes that' is not ambiguous in English, and more specifically, it would be extremely implausible to suggest that what it means is affected by what complement sentence appears after 'that'.
- (30) If Expressive-Assertivism is true, then when an ethical complement sentence is used with 'believes that', a complex psychological state (with representational and conative components) is attributed.
- (31) When a nonethical complement sentence is used with 'believes that', a representational psychological state alone is attributed.
- (32) If a representational state alone is attributed when a nonethical sentence is used as the complement of 'believes that', but a different type of psychological state is attributed when an ethical sentence is used as the complement of 'believes that', then 'believes that' is ambiguous.

Therefore,

- (33) If Expressive-Assertivism is true, then 'believes that' is ambiguous. ((30)-(32))

Therefore,

- (34) Expressive-Assertivism is false. ((29), (33))

For now, I will respond to this objection on the assumption that a sentence's having an expressive component does play a role in determining the kind of attitude that is attributed by 'believes that'. I will then argue that the expressive components of sentences in fact play such a role.

Even assuming that a sentence's having an expressive component plays such a role, this objection fails, because (32) is false. There are three main strategies for providing the semantics for sentences containing attitude-attribution verbs, which we may call the "sentential account," "propositional account," and "utterance account." Any of these strategies can be adopted by Expressive-Assertivism without its being committed to attitude-attribution verbs being ambiguous. I will illustrate the strategy first in the case of a sentential account and then indicate how it can be modified for a propositional account. In doing so, the modification of the strategy for an utterance account will become transparent. A sentential account of the semantics of 'believes that' would hold that the subjects of (27) and (28) have psychological states that are the same in content as the semantic content of their respective complement sentences. Let's assume for simplicity

that the semantic content of a sentence is constituted only by the sentence's representational (truth-conditional) content and its expressive content.⁴ A sentential account of the semantics of (27) would then hold that John has a psychological state whose content is the same as the semantic content of the sentence 'Jackie is a lawyer' (as used on the occasion of utterance—henceforth, I omit this qualification for brevity). Since we can safely assume that 'Jackie is a lawyer' does not have expressive content, the sentential account of the semantics of (27) would hold that John has a psychological state with the same representational content and (trivially) the same expressive content as the sentence 'Jackie is a lawyer'. A sentential account of the semantics of (28) would hold then that John has a psychological state whose content is the same as the semantic content of the sentence 'Donating to charity is right'. Since 'Donating to charity is right' (according to Expressive-Assertivism) has both representational content and expressive content, the sentential account of the semantics of (28) would require that John has a psychological state with the same representational content as 'Donating to charity is right', say, that donating to charity maximizes the general welfare, and with the same expressive content as 'Donating to charity is right', say, acceptance toward things that maximize general welfare. The important thing to note here is that the *semantics* of 'believes that', as it is used in (27) and (28), is the same: an attitude is being attributed to the subject of the sentence in which the verb is used, which is the same in content as its complement sentence. Of course, since the semantic contents of the respective complement sentences differ, so does the particular attitude being attributed to the subject of the sentence. However, this does not mean, in turn, that the *semantics* of 'believes that'

⁴ A sentence may also have directive or prescriptive content.

also differs, i.e., this does not mean that 'believes that' is ambiguous. Analogously, even though our semantic evaluations of (35) and (36) differ significantly (since (35), but not (36), is to be evaluated as true or false), we do not think that 'and' is ambiguous.

(35) Jackie is a lawyer and John is doctor.

(36) Donating to charity is right and don't forget it.

Rather, our semantic evaluations of the sentences are a function of the embedded sentences interacting with a word that has a uniform meaning.

A propositional account of the semantics of 'believes that' would also hold that the grammatical subjects of (27) and (28) have psychological states that are the same in content as the semantic content of their respective complement sentences, only it would articulate the specifically representational content by employing the notion of a proposition. A propositional account of the semantics of (27) would hold that John has a psychological state that is the same in content as the proposition *that Jackie is a lawyer*. On the assumption that a sentence's expressive component plays a role in determining the kind of psychological state attributed by 'believes that', a complete propositional account would also have to contain a clause allowing for such an attribution. The easiest way to do this is to include a clause that holds that any conative attitude attributed is the same in expressive content as the complement sentence. Thus, a propositional account of the semantics of (27) would also hold that John has a psychological state with the same expressive content as the sentence 'Jackie is a lawyer'. Thus, as with the sentential account, the state attributed to John in (27) is, trivially, the same in expressive content as 'Jackie is a lawyer'. A propositional account of the semantics of (28) would hold that John has a psychological state with the same representational content as the proposition *that donating to charity is right*, say, that donating to charity maximizes general welfare,

and with the same expressive content as the sentence 'Donating to charity is right', say, approval toward things that maximize general welfare. As with the sentential account, the important thing to note is that, though the semantic content of the respective complement sentences differs in (27) and (28), the semantics of 'believes that' does not, in turn, differ, and hence, 'believes that' is not ambiguous. A similar kind of story can be told even more straightforwardly about the utterance account. Thus, Expressive-Assertivism can adopt any of the three main strategies for providing the semantics for sentences containing attitude-attribution verbs without being forced to conclude that these verbs are ambiguous. Thus, The Objection from Ambiguity of Attitude-Attribution Verbs poses no threat to Expressive-Assertivism.

I now show that that my defense of Expressive-Assertivism from this objection is relevant, for a complement sentence's having an expressive component *in fact* plays a role in determining the kind of psychological state attributed by the use of 'believes that'. There are two reasons why one might think otherwise. First, one might think that 'believes that' really is used only to attribute a representational state, and that, therefore, a sentence's having an expressive function cannot play a role in attributing a conative state when used in the complement of a belief report. However, this claim is intuitively implausible, especially in light of the entire range of evaluative sentences that might be embedded as complement sentences after 'believes that'. For example, if we fill in schema S₇ with the expressions mentioned earlier—'beautiful', 'a sweetheart', 'an angel', 'a sugar dumpling', 'a saint', 'a bozo', 'a jerk', 'a Yankee', 'a frog', 'a kraut', 'a spic', 'a towelhead', 'a wop', 'a nigger', 'a Jesus-freak', 'a kike'—it seems intuitively obvious that a conative attitude is being attributed to Jackie.

S₇: Jackie believes that Aurie is _____.

Moreover, suppose John has every reason to believe that Jackie PL-utters (37)-(41), has no idea what Jackie's conative attitudes are towards anything, but reports Jackie's beliefs by using (42)-(46).

- (37) Aurie is genuinely friendly to everyone she meets.
- (38) Aurie is always gladly willing to help out whenever someone is in need.
- (39) Aurie is a white American.
- (40) Aurie is Hispanic.
- (41) Aurie is Jewish.
- (42) Jackie believes that Aurie is a sweetheart.
- (43) Jackie believes that Aurie is an angel.
- (44) Jackie believes that Aurie is a Yankee.
- (45) Jackie believes that Aurie is a spic.
- (46) Jackie believes that Aurie is a kike.

Let's assume that the properties picked out by the predicates of the complement clauses in (42)-(46) are those that are also picked out by the predicates in (37)-(41). Still, intuitively, (42)-(46) are *misreports*. However, they would not be misreports if 'believes that' were used to attribute only representational states. Therefore, we should conclude that 'believes that' is not used to attribute only representational states.

The second reason one might think that a complement sentence's expressive component plays no role in determining the kind of psychological state attributed by the attitude-attribution verbs is that one might think that the conative state involved in the use of 'believes that' is expressed by the speaker, rather than attributed to the subject of the sentence. Let's look at some examples that might give rise to such an idea. Suppose John has every reason to believe that Jackie PL-utters (47),

- (47) Italians eat a lot of pasta.

and reports Jackie's belief as in (48).

- (48) Jackie believes that wops eat a lot of pasta.

In this case, it seems clear that the complement clause in (48) is being used to express the speaker's conative state, rather than helping to determine that a conative state is attributed to Jackie. Similarly, suppose John has every reason to suppose to Jackie PL-utters (49),

(49) Christians are sincere in their beliefs.

and reports Jackie's belief as in (50).

(50) Jackie believes that Jesus-freaks are sincere in their beliefs.

Again, it seems clear that the complement clause in (50) is being used to express the speaker's conative state, rather than helping to determine that a conative state is attributed to Jackie. These examples provide some evidence for the claim that a complement sentence's expressive component is being expressed by the speaker rather than attributed by 'believes that'.

The first part of my response is to point out that (48) and (50) can also be used to attribute the conative states to Jackie, for example, if we suppose that John has every reason to believe that Jackie PL-utters (51) and (52), and uses (48) and (50) to report this.

(51) Wops eat a lot of pasta.

(52) Jesus-freaks are sincere in their religious beliefs.

The second part of my response is to explain these two readings of (48) and (50) as instances of scope phenomena. In the first case, the quantified noun phrase, 'wops', takes wide scope relative to 'believes that', while in the second case, the quantified noun phrase, 'Jesus-freaks', takes narrow scope relative to 'believes that'. That is, in the first case, we understand (48) as (48'), while in the second case, we understand (50) as (50').

(48') [All x: x is wop][Jackie believes that x eats a lot of pasta].

(50') Jackie believes that [all x: x is a Jesus-freak][x is sincere in x's religious belief].

Therefore, cases in which we understand belief reports as used to express a speaker's conative state are cases in which the quantified noun phrases used in the complement sentences, which carry the expressive component of the complement sentences, take wide scope relative to 'believes that', and hence, do not play a role in determining the attitude attributed by the 'believes that'. However, cases in which we understand belief reports as used to attribute a conative state to the subject of the sentence are cases in which the quantified noun phrases used in the complement sentences take narrow scope relative to 'believes that', and hence, do play a role in determining the attitude attributed by 'believes that'. Therefore, the appearance that complement sentences containing quantified noun phrase are used to express a speaker's conative state is easily explained as taking wide-scope relative to 'believes that'. Kaplan discusses similar scope phenomena with quantified noun phrases used in discourse reports. See (Kaplan 1989, p. 555, ft. 71). Therefore, we should remain convinced that a complement sentence's expressive component in fact plays a role in determining the kind of psychological state attributed by the attitude-attribution verb.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

The three fundamental features of Expressive-Assertivism are the Central Tenet and the Generality and Extensionality Principles. According to the Central Tenet, a PL-utterance of a basic ethical sentence, such as 'Donating to charity is right', is the performance of both a direct assertive illocutionary act and a direct expressive illocutionary act. According to the Generality Principle, the attitude thereby expressed by the speaker is directed toward anything that has the property picked out by the ethical predicate used in the ethical sentence. According to the Extensionality Principle, the attitude thereby expressed is expressed whenever an ethical predicate appears in an extensional context.

Expressive-Assertivism is a powerful, yet elegant, metaethical theory. It (a) swiftly dissolves the most fundamental problem in contemporary metaethics, The Moral Problem, (b) is credible and realistic, since its three central features are modeled on those of other evaluative predicates, (c) is supported by thought experiments about the translation of ethical predicates, (d) is not forced to accept controversial views about the natures of truth and moral properties, and (e) is able to respond rather easily to what many take to be the most forceful objection to any Expressivist theory, The Embedding Objection.

The fundamental issue in contemporary metaethics is how best to solve The Moral Problem, which is the problem of reconciling Descriptivity, Practicality, and Distinctness. Simple Expressivist theories, such as Ayer's Emotivism, Blackburn's Projectivism, and

Gibbard's Norm Expressivism, resolve The Moral Problem by rejecting Descriptivity. In doing so, however, each runs up quickly against some initial difficulties that would not arise if each did not reject Descriptivity. Ayer and Gibbard simply do not take up the burden of accounting for the data that supports Descriptivity. Although Blackburn does account for some of the data, he does not account for all of it. Most importantly, he does not account for why basic ethical sentences are in the indicative mood. Furthermore, his Projectivism makes PL-utterances of all complex sentences direct expressives, and accepts a controversial Minimalist view of truth.

Simple Assertivist theories, such as Moore's Nonnaturalism, Mackie's Error Theory, and Smith's rationalist theory, resolve The Moral Problem by rejecting Practicality. In doing so, however, each also runs up against some initial difficulties that would not arise if each did not reject Practicality. In particular, the features each attributes to moral properties make their theories more questionable than the claim of Practicality that each rejects. Moore holds that moral properties are undetectable by the senses and not accounted for by the natural sciences; he thus holds that moral properties are nonnatural properties. Mackie valiantly accounts for the data that supports Practicality, but at the cost of holding that moral properties have the remarkable power of necessarily motivating every person who comes to believe that an act has those properties. Because no natural property could have such power, Mackie concludes that moral properties are also nonnatural properties. Smith does a much better job of accounting for the data that supports Practicality without making moral properties too remarkable. They are, however, remarkable nonetheless, for according to Smith, moral properties are such that, necessarily, all fully rational people would approve (or disapprove) of any act that has

such properties. Moreover, his theory does not adequately account for the data that support Prescriptivity, for it does not explain why we would expect any particular individual's attitude to change in the wake of change in moral judgment. Finally, Smith's Simple Assertivist theory raises epistemological difficulties, since it is not clear how, given the little that he has said about moral properties, we can come to have moral knowledge, or even any justified moral beliefs.

Expressive-Assertivism does not reject any of the three intuitively compelling claims that give rise to The Moral Problem, so it avoids most of the initial difficulties faced by Simple Expressivists and Simple Assertivists, and all of those just mentioned. However, because it does not reject any of these claims, it is forced to show that they are not mutually inconsistent after all. Descriptivity, Practicality, and Distinctness are not mutually inconsistent after all, because a hidden assumption is required in order to generate an inconsistency, namely, that a PL-utterance of a basic ethical sentence is *not* the performance of both a direct assertive and a direct expressive. However, there is little reason to accept this assumption. Indeed, given the data that support Descriptivity and Practicality, this assumption is intuitively false. Thus, Expressive-Assertivism dissolves The Moral Problem by rejecting the assumption, which, as we have seen, is tantamount to accepting the Central Tenet of Expressive-Assertivism.

Because the Central Tenet and the Extensionality and Generality Principles are modeled on three uncontroversial features of predicates from other parts of natural languages, Expressive-Assertivism is unsurprising, credible, and realistic. For example, it is clear that PL-utterances of sentences containing emotionally charged predicates, such as sentences used to issue racial epithets (e.g., 'Aurie is a ____'), are the performances of

a direct assertive and a direct expressive, the attitude thereby expressed is directed toward all people who have the property picked out by the predicate, and is expressed by a speaker whenever he or she uses the predicate in an extensional context. Likewise, it is clear that PL-utterances of sentences containing thick ethical predicates, such as 'courageous' and 'vile', are the performances of a direct assertive and a direct expressive, the attitude thereby expressed is directed toward all individuals that have the property picked out by the predicate, and the speaker expressed this attitude whenever she uses the predicate in an extensional context. Thus, it would not be surprising to find that ethical predicates share these features with their evaluative cousins.

Certain thought experiments about the translation of ethical predicates also lend support to Expressive-Assertivism. For example, it is intuitively clear that we would not translate the predicates 'is right' and 'is wrong' of the historically isolated culture described in Chapter 4 into the English 'is right' and 'is wrong', which suggests that there is an ineliminable expressivist element in using ethical predicates, and hence, that the correct metaethical theory is a kind of Expressivist theory.

Expressive-Assertivism does not require the acceptance of Minimalism about truth, nor any view according to which moral properties have some remarkable features. Thus, Expressive-Assertivism is preferable, *mutatis mutandis*, to Expressivist and Assertivist theories that do.

Finally, Expressive-Assertivism can respond rather easily to the five most forceful objections that arise from the possibility of embedding ethical sentences in more complex sentences. It responds to The Objection from Truth- and Fact-Ascriptions by holding that utterances such as 'It is true that donating to charity is right' in fact ascribes truth to

beliefs, propositions, assertives, etc.—even according to a robust view of truth. It responds to The Objection from Missing Exclamations by holding that basic ethical sentences have, but exclamations do not have, descriptive content, and hence, basic ethical sentence can, but exclamations cannot, appear in contexts that require sentences that have descriptive content. Because it endorses the Generality and Extensionality Principles, it is able to respond to The Objection from Missing Expressives by denying that no direct expressive is performed in PL-uttering complex ethical sentences.

Expressive-Assertivism responds to The Objection from Incomplete Semantics in three parts. First, it denies that Expressivists have any special burden that others do not also have, since it is clear that there are an entire range of evaluative sentences that retain their expressive function when embedded; hence, there must be a semantic account that explains this data, and the burden to uncover it falls on everyone, not just Expressivists. Second, this objection cannot be a challenge for Expressive-Assertivism to account for the truth-conditional or descriptive meaning of complex sentences, since Expressive-Assertivism is able to accept a robust notion of truth; hence, Expressive-Assertivism is able to take advantage of a Tarski-style semantic theory to explain the meanings of complex sentences on the basis of understanding meanings of its component sentences, logical connectives, and syntactic combination. Third, because of the Extensionality Principle, Expressive-Assertivism is not required to provide a compositional account of the expressive meanings of complex ethical sentences. Finally, Expressive-Assertivism responds to The Objection from Ambiguity of Attitude-Attribution Verbs by showing that Expressivism does not at all entail the ambiguity of such verbs. Because The Embedding Objection is the most pressing objection to any Expressivist theory, and

because Expressive-Assertivism can respond to The Embedding Objection rather easily, there is little reason to reject Expressive-Assertivism.

Thus, Expressive-Assertivism solves The Moral Problem, has support from other parts of the language, is supported by some convincing translation thought experiments, is consistent with, but does not require acceptance of some controversial views about the nature of truth and moral properties, and avoids rather easily the most pressing objection to any Expressivist theory. I conclude that Expressive-Assertivism is the best overall metaethical theory.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH


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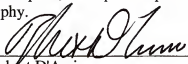
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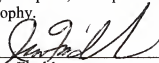
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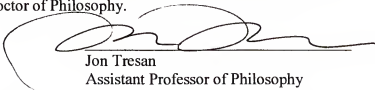
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